Film Quarterly

Volume 49
Number 3
Spring 1996

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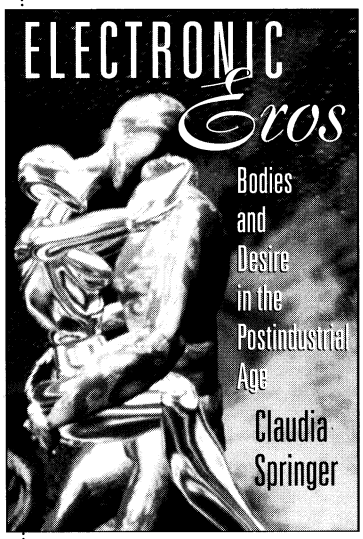

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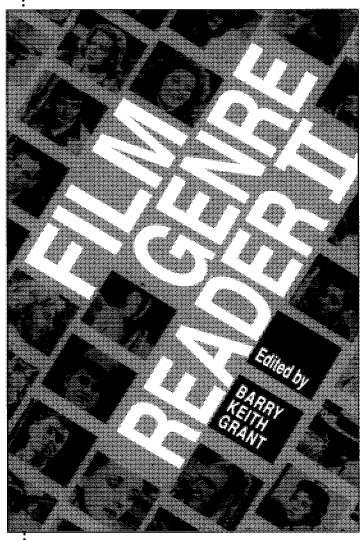

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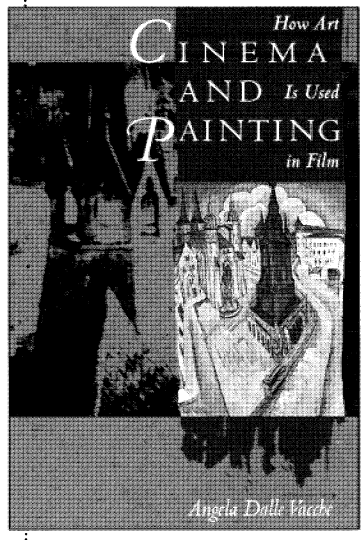

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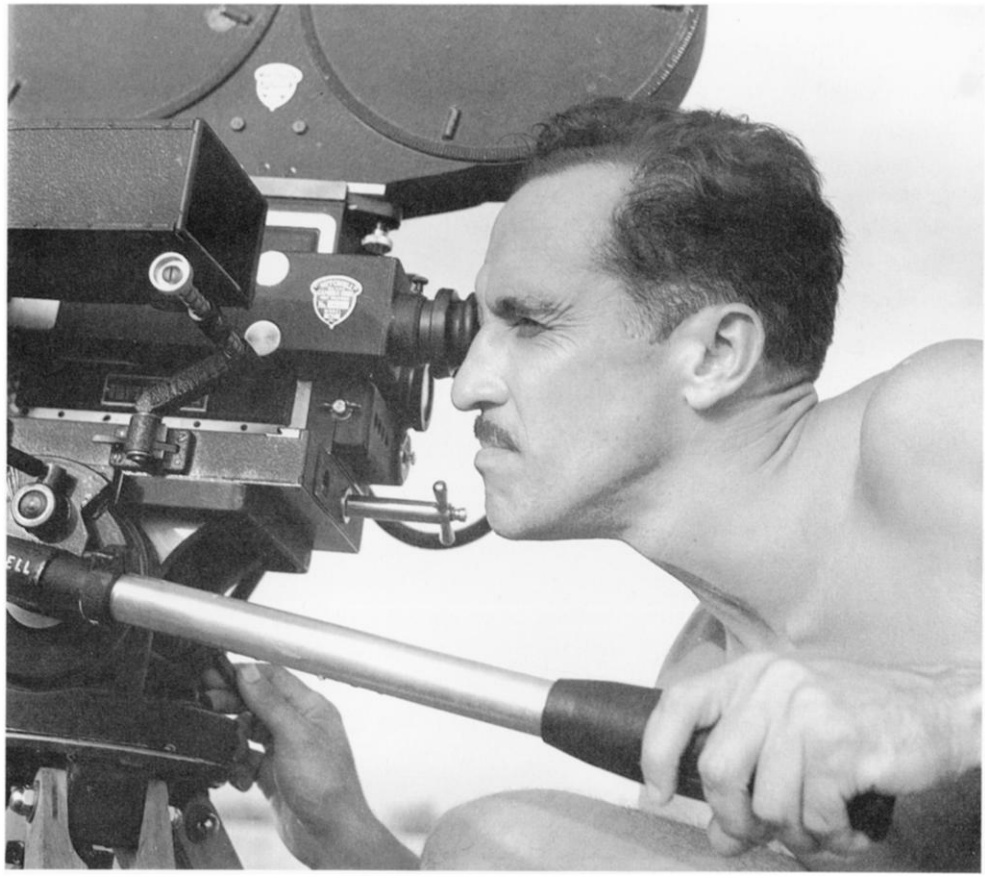
EA6

Elena Feder

A Reckoning

Interview with Gabriel Figueroa

Like many of the great artists of his generation, Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa's life and vision shaped and was shaped by the historical events that propelled the Mexican nation into modernity after the Revolution of 1910. Born in 1908 in Mexico City, and orphaned in early childhood, he studied painting and photography on his own and found work with a film studio that eventually sent him to the United States to study cinematography for a year with Gregg Toland. Returning to Mexico in 1936, Figueroa began a prolific career. His work spans over six decades of outstanding achievement, both as an artist and a political activist—he cofounded, in 1944, the first independent union of cinema artisans, STPC [Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica], in Mexico, and was blacklisted in the McCarthy era for his support of its victims. His artistic legacy is reflected in more than 200 films, including the most canonical images of Mexican cinema from the Golden Age and after, and in numerous national and international awards. Since his solo debut in the classic, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (*Over There, on the Big Ranch*, Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), Figueroa has worked uninterruptedly with several generations of legendary national and international directors. With Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, the most important director of Mexican Golden Age cinema (*María Candelaria* and *Flor Silvestre,* 1943; *La perla,* 1945; *Río Escondido,* 1947; *Pueblerina* and *Salón México,* 1948), Figueroa developed that particular blend of expressionistic lighting (chiaroscuro), deep focus, and dramatic composition that became his signature style, a style that joined Renaissance painting with the latest Hollywood techniques and avant-garde experiments of the Mexican visual art movements, muralism, and the graphic arts. Figueroa also collaborated on award-winning productions with Julio Bracho (*Distinto amanecer,* 1943); John Ford (*The Fugitive,* 1947); Roberto Gavaldón (*Macario,* 1959, *La rosa blanca,* 1961, *Días de otoño,* 1962); Luis Buñuel (*Los olvidados,* 1950, *Nazarín,* 1958, *The Exterminating Angel,* 1962); Ismael Rodríguez (*Animas Trujano,* 1961, *El hombre de papel,* 1963); Marcela Fernández Violante (*Cananea,* 1976); and John Huston (*The Night of the Iguana,* 1963, *Under the Volcano,* 1983). This interview was conducted on 24 February, 1995, in Los Angeles, where Gabriel Figueroa travelled at the invitation of the American Society of Cinematographers to receive its prestigious third Annual International Award, established to recognize excellence in cinematography outside the United States.



Gabriel Figueroa filming *La perla*

ELENA FEDER: *Your lengthy participation in the history of Mexican and U.S. cinema began with the cinematography for* Allá en el Rancho Grande. *You witnessed some of the most important and exciting years of the country's existence, met almost everyone who has become an icon today: Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo. . . .*

GABRIEL FIGUEROA: Everyone. We all knew one another. That is why I did not accept the contract that Sam Goldwyn offered me after Gregg Toland's death in 1948. It was a five-year contract under great conditions. Goldwyn telephoned me personally. I said I needed time to think it over and asked him to call back in three days, at which point I declined the offer. Goldwyn never forgot this. Four or five years ago, my good friend Gunther Gerzo, the best painter in Mexico today, returned from a trip to California with a story. He had asked Samuel Goldwyn's daughters to recommend the best possible brand of chocolates available for his friend, Gabriel Figueroa. "Ah!" they replied. "That is the man who refused to sign a contract with our father." Forty years later and they still remembered.

To start with your early career: Can you describe your collaboration with Fernando de Fuentes on Allá en el Rancho Grande? *This was about the time you were beginning to develop your own visual style; the difference in visual language between this film and the earlier two in De Fuentes' trilogy about the Revolution,* El compadre Mendoza *and* Vámonos con Pancho Villa, *is enormous.*

Allá en el Rancho Grande brought me my first international prize in Venice, but I also collaborated on the previous two films in the trilogy. After returning from the U.S., I signed a contract with the company [CLASA Films] which had paid for my studies there. I had learned everything one could possible know about lighting from Gregg Toland, but did not know how to use a camera very well. Fernando de

Fuentes, who was also employed by CLASA, told me, "You cannot do the cinematography for the film I am working on now because such a big production requires a great deal of experience, which you lack. I will give you your first opportunity when the time comes. In the meantime, find something else to do." Since I had already shot some documentaries, I asked Jack Draper to accept me as camera operator, to which he happily agreed. There were never any complaints. I was Draper's camera operator for three films before shooting *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*, *El compadre Mendoza*, and *Cielito lindo* [Roberto O'Quigley, 1936]. They were all for CLASA Films.[1]

You also worked with another highly esteemed director, Emilio Fernández, in 23 films over 13 years. How did that collaboration process get started?

Emilio Fernández had just finished making two cheap films when he joined Films Mundiales, the production company a group of us formed in 1941, at the suggestion of Fernando de Fuentes, who was then the best director in Mexico. We had asked Fuentes to direct Dolores del Rio, but he was already committed to directing María Félix in *Doña Bárbara* [1943], a project he was deeply interested in. So, on his recommendation, we signed a contract with Fernandez immediately.

But before my collaboration with Emilio began, I worked on three or four films with Julio Bracho: *¡Ay que tiempos señor Don Simón!* [*What Times These Are, Don Simón!*, 1941], *Historia de un gran amor* [*The Story of a Great Love*, 1942], and *Distinto amanecer* [*A Different Dawn*], his best film. All of us contributed 50 percent of our salaries in exchange for a partnership in Films Mundiales. We made wonderful films. Ironically, when Augustin Fink, our general manager died, they fired all of us on the spot. "We don't want any geniuses here," the new manager told Emilio Fernández, actors Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendáriz, and myself.

Anyway, it was with Fernández that I really began to develop my own style. He allowed me to compose a scene anyway I wanted. He would describe the setup initially, explain what he wanted to convey, and then say something like, "There, now set up the lights and put the camera wherever you wish." So I would place the camera, choose the angle, and illuminate a

La perla (1945)

Macario (1959)

scene, always looking for the desired effect. From the very beginning, when we shot the opening scene of *María Candelaria*, where she holds the piglet in her arms, Fernández told me to place the camera wherever I wanted. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the rushes; they went beyond his wildest imagination. Since that point I had complete freedom to continue developing my own style.

What role does your own fantasy play when you conceive or conceptualize the images a director wants to see represented on the screen? Do you think consciously about how to control everything in the frame, or do you sometimes allow yourself to be surprised by what is out there and slips in accidentally?

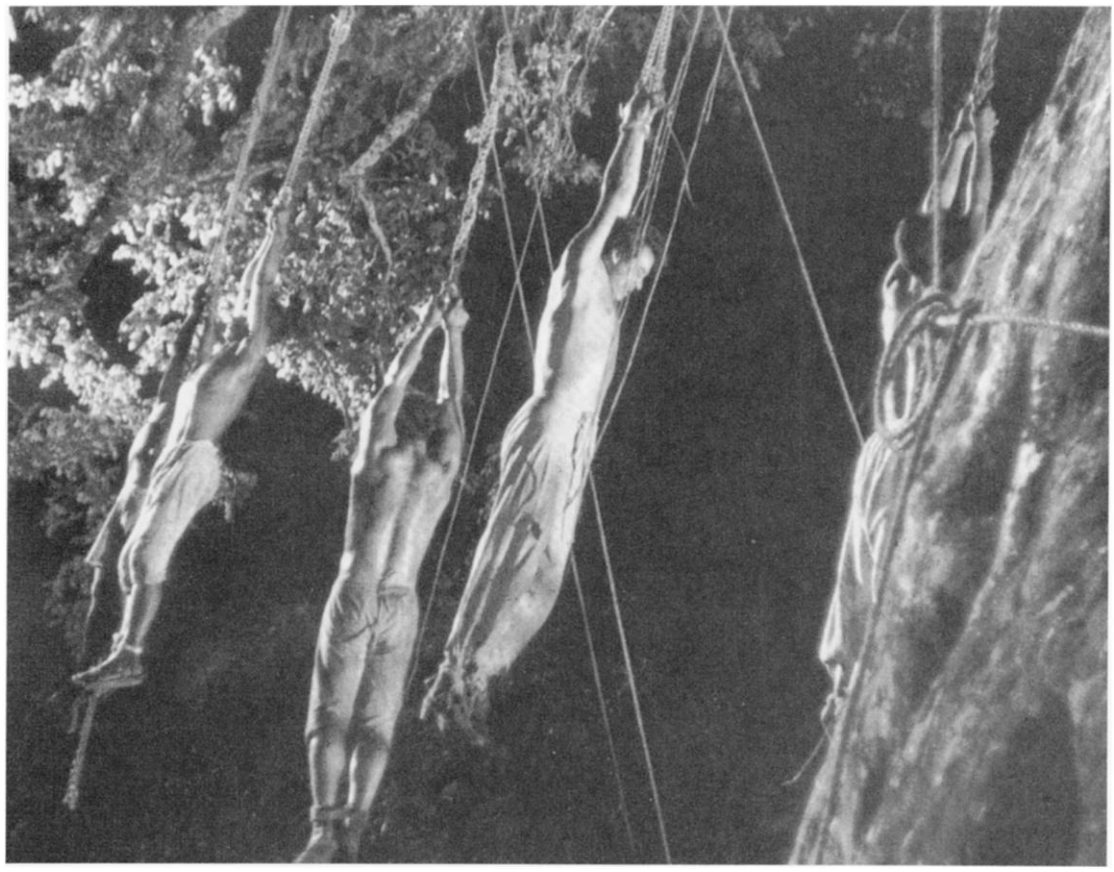
First of all, the idea belongs to the director. It is he who indicates the direction he wants to follow. Those are the rules of the game. Emilio Fernández discussed with me the effects that he wanted to achieve, before I proceeded with the composition. I then had to think, often very quickly, how to bring about the desired effects, figure the best lighting, the best angle.

You have often referred to the influence of Dr. Atl [Mexican painter, a.k.a. Gerardo Murillo, 1875–1964] in your development of curvilinear perspective. What other important formative influences do you recognize?

Besides Dr. Atl, my application of curvilinear perspective to the moving image was also inspired by the perspectival experiments of Orson Welles and Gregg Toland, and before them by the Spanish painter, Diego Velázquez. His *Las Meninas* is without any doubt one of the best renderings of perspective in the world, curvilinear as well as rectilinear. I used both perspectives when framing a scene—the latter more than the former, of course.

What elements led you to decide to frame a shot or construct a scene with either—or both—a rectilinear or a curvilinear perspective?

Well, the principle of rectilinear perspective is to guide the gaze to a particular point centered in the frame. Curvilinear perspective, on the other hand, works to split the eye between two distinct perspectival points of entry, joined by means of lines travelling along a curved plane within the frame. This increases the illusion of depth. In addition, the techni-



La rebelión de los colgades (1954)

cal development of wide-angle lenses made it possible to add even more depth and content to a particular frame or scene.

Do you make a connection between the meaning or theme of a shot and your choice of either perspective?

Of course I do. I have been told that the dialogue is not what makes most of my films interesting, that what communicates meaning is the image. The image has to speak forcefully on its own terms.

Do you mean to say that you decide beforehand to elicit a particular response, look for a certain impact, and then frame your images accordingly?

Precisely. The Spanish poet Federico García Lorca once said that an artist must have character and *duende* [roughly: "inspired madness"] to develop his or her own style, and I have more *duende* than anything else. When I helped with the cinematography for *Tarzan*, we had to follow the storyboard very closely. As far as the content of a particular shot was concerned, however, I chose the camera angle in ways that would enhance the meaning of a character. For Tarzan, played by Johnny Weissmuller, I placed it almost at ground level in order to accentuate even more his great strength. Weissmuller never forgot this. When we met many years later, he told me enthusiastically, "I remember the amazing close-ups you took of me, from below!" Such details were of course not included in the storyboard. This has always been my strength, my *duende*.

Similarly, when Merian C. Cooper, producer and director of the first *King Kong*, and John Ford's business partner, came to Mexico in preparation for filming *The Fugitive*, he was told by Gregg Toland to look me up. Toland had been unable to secure a release from MGM to work with John Ford on the film. Ford was on bad terms with Samuel Goldwyn, but wanted Toland because, he told him, he understood the power of Mexican painting like no one else. When it became clear that Toland's participation was out of the question, Ford asked him to recommend someone in Hollywood whose work approximated his own. Toland responded that there was no one there with such qualifications, and that the person who came the closest to his own work actually lived in Mexico.

When Cooper arrived, we were filming *Enamorada* [*Woman in Love*, Emilio Fernández, 1946], and in fact had just returned from shooting the ending, which is magnificent, on location in Puebla. Cooper told me he wanted to shoot a few films in Mexico and was interested in observing how we worked. He did not mention that he was checking me out. He did notice, however, that when Emilio told me to place the camera, say, below, I would shoot either from below, from above, or from anywhere else I chose. After we showed him the rushes, he inquired how many days of work had gone into producing that ending. "One day and one night," I told him. "You are hired," he replied, "to work with John Ford." This is the kind of good fortune that has accompanied me throughout my life.

When Ford finally arrived in Mexico, Cooper recommended me highly. "He is a splendid photographer," he told him, "but he has the peculiar habit of choosing the composition himself." Ford found this intriguing and decided to allow me the same freedom. Only with Emilio Fernández, John Ford, Roberto Gavaldón, and Ismael Rodríguez was I free to compose a scene any way I chose.

This was not the case with John Huston. On *The Night of the Iguana*, I collaborated in the composition of about 30 percent of the images. As is the case with most directors, Huston disregarded most of my suggestions, insisting instead on his own compositions. The same was true of Luis Buñuel. He arrived on the set with the scene completely fixed in his mind, composed to the smallest detail, measured down to the second, including the number of steps an actor was to take from one spot to another. You removed the clipboard and the markers on both ends of a shot, and you ended up with a fully edited film. At the most you might have had to cut three to four hundred feet, which is nothing; generally, a director removes one to two thousand feet in the first cut alone.

Beyond the individual, how did working within a cinematic tradition that is dependent on somewhat volatile government policies affect you?

It is very difficult, very difficult, especially because what is at issue is creativity, my own creativity. Many have tried to imitate me, and not only in Mexico. After I refused to work with Elia Kazan in

Río Escondido
(1947)

Un día de vida (1950)

Viva Zapata!, for instance, he also tried to copy my style. I chose not to work on that film because the script was awful. Kazan, myself, and Steinbeck, who wrote it, first discussed the script for three days in Cuernavaca, to no avail. We met in Cuernavaca because I had been unable to travel to Hollywood at their invitation due to the problems I had in obtaining a visa.

During my interview with the American consul he asked a series of questions, purportedly due to new rules and regulations, some of which I refused to answer. The questions ranged from the reason for my previous trip to Los Angeles to what political party I belonged to. I had gone to receive the Golden Globe award, I answered, a handsome trophy which I would have brought along to show him, I added, had I known that he would be asking me such questions. As for the political party, I told him that that was none of his business. We got into a brawl. Were he the ambassador, I said, I might consider answering, but a U. S. commercial attaché in Mexico had no business asking such questions. He waved a copy of the Constitution before my eyes, saying that one of his privileges was to ask any questions he pleased, even of important people like myself. If that is the case, I replied, please remove the stamp from my passport and refund me the ten dollars I paid downstairs, because I am not going to the United States. That is why Kazan and Steinbeck had to travel to Cuernavaca to meet with me. After we argued about the script for three days, I left for Mexico City. A few days later, Kazan told me on the telephone, "You are a very brave man to argue with Steinbeck." "No. I did not argue with Steinbeck," I answered, "I argued with his script, which is not the same."

What was the problem with the script?

There was plenty to be critical of. In the first place, it was impossible to know what Zapata was fighting for. Among the scenes that I strongly criticized was one where, on a visit to his bride at her family home, Zapata says: "La mona aunque se vista de seda mona se queda." ["You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."] I insisted that Zapata would have never said anything similar, and demanded that they remove the words from the script. Kazan took note of all my observations, but at the end those lines were still there one year later when they sent me the latest version of the script to read, hoping that I would agree to shoot it. Of course, I refused. Years later, Kazan wrote in his

memoirs that it was he who did not want Gabriel Figueroa to shoot *Viva Zapata!* A copy of one of his letters to the contrary was published in Alberto Isaac's biography, *Conversaciones con Gabriel Figueroa.*[2]

That was not the only time I refused to work with Kazan. Not the least of my reasons was because he had been a friendly witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee during the McCarthy era. He continued to insist, both directly and indirectly. When he was filming *America, America*, for instance, he needed to shoot a scene in the snow, which was nowhere to be found in the States at that time of year. Someone mentioned that there was always snow in Mexico, on the Popocatepetl, so to Mexico they all went. Kazan arranged for someone get in touch with me and invite me to the shoot, which they did after first calling the union to verify that I was not involved in another project. I told them that I was busy and had not registered my work because I was shooting a documentary that interested me a great deal.

Was it true?

No, it was not true. I would not work with Kazan under any circumstances.

Many films on which you worked, especially those in the forties and fifties, are hailed as the foremost representatives of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Why do you think that era saw such a flowering of talent?

The greatness of Golden Age of Mexican cinema will never again be repeated, simply because in those days we had the greatest writers on our side. And not only Mexican ones. Graham Greene was the author of *The Fugitive*, originally called *The Power and the Glory*; Tennessee Williams, then the best playwright in the world, wrote *The Night of the Iguana*, and Malcolm Lowry wrote *Under the Volcano.* Among the films I shot for Fernández, *Enamorada* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, by Iñigo de Martino; *La malquerida* [*The Ill-loved Woman*, 1949] is an excellent translation into *Mexicanidad* of the Spaniard Jacinto Benavente's play of the same name; and John Steinbeck wrote the script for *La perla*, which we shot twice, in Spanish and in English, because dubbing technology was not yet developed.

La perla was a great film. The proof is that forty years later, when it reopened in Japan, a reporter sent

Pueblerina
(1948)

from Tokyo to interview me still wondered about the cinematography. Of all my films, *La perla* has received the largest number of awards: Venice, Brussels, Spain, Hollywood, the Golden Globe, . . . etc.

Is it your favorite?

Cinematographically, my best film is *The Fugitive*. My other favorites are *La perla* and *Enamorada*, in that order, and some ten or twelve others.

What is the story behind the disastrous English-language remake of Enamorada *as* The Torch *[Fernández, 1950]?*

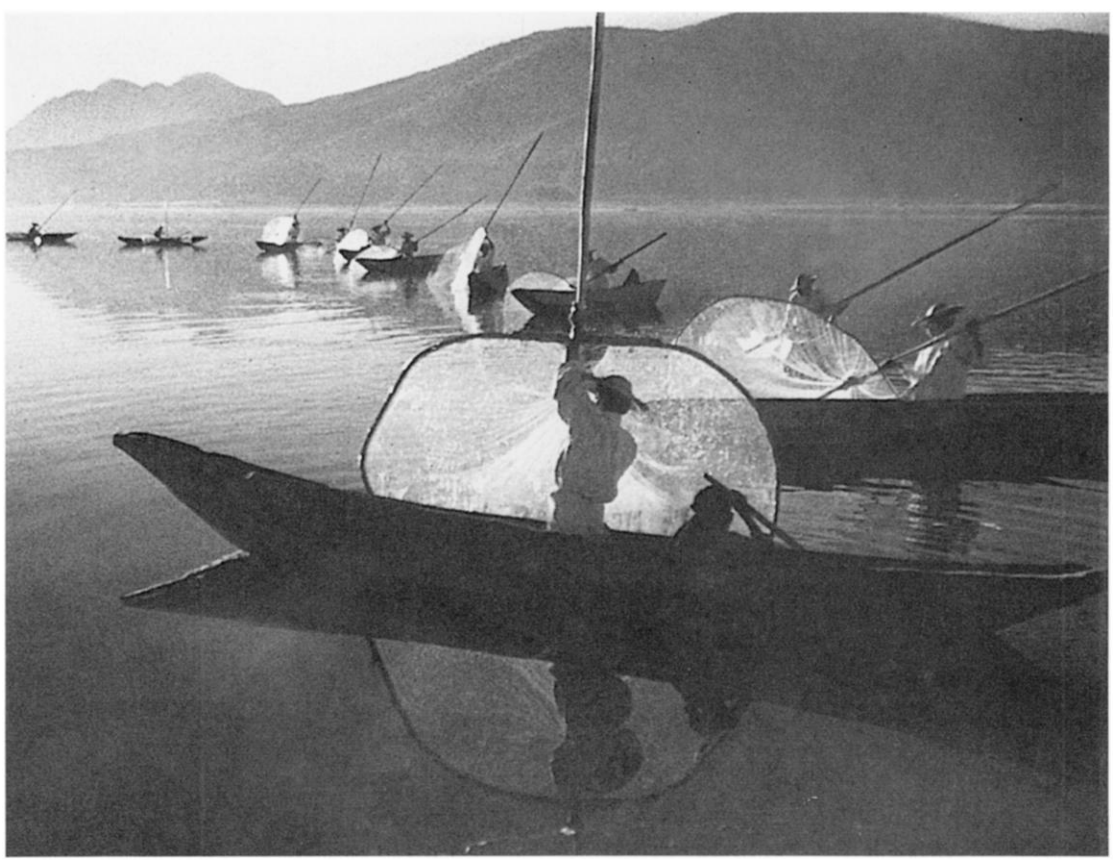
Since *Enamorada* had been a great success, RKO decided to reshoot the film in English, and sent us Paulette Goddard, as well as several other artists, to play alongside Pedro Amendáriz. The problem was that Paulette Goddard was a bit too old for the part; she was miscast from the start. The cinema is unforgiving when it comes to such matters. Miscasting can destroy any film because there is a limit to an audience's capacity to suspend disbelief. John Huston's *Under the Volcano* was also a failure because it was completely miscast.

To return to the role cinema played during the Golden Age, what do you think of Emilio Fernández's assertion that there is no Mexico besides the one he invented? What is your opinion about this notion of inventing a reality?

The real Mexico *was* the invention of Emilio Fernández, but also of his screenwriter, Mauricio Magdaleno, who worked on all his films and was an excellent writer. Emilio would sketch out the story and ask Magdaleno to develop it further. Magdaleno was very familiar with Mexican history, and knew the particulars of the Mexican Revolution very well. He had even been Subsecretary of Education. I am sure he introduced changes and invented a great deal when it came to portraying the Revolution, however, but film was not the Revolution...

What do you think about the way Fernández worked out his vision of the relation between racial oppression, land ownership, education, and religion in his films? Did you generally agree with his interpretation of such issues—Indian-White relations, for instance?

To begin with, "El Indio" Fernandez, as you can



Maclovia
(1948)

Enamorada
(1946)

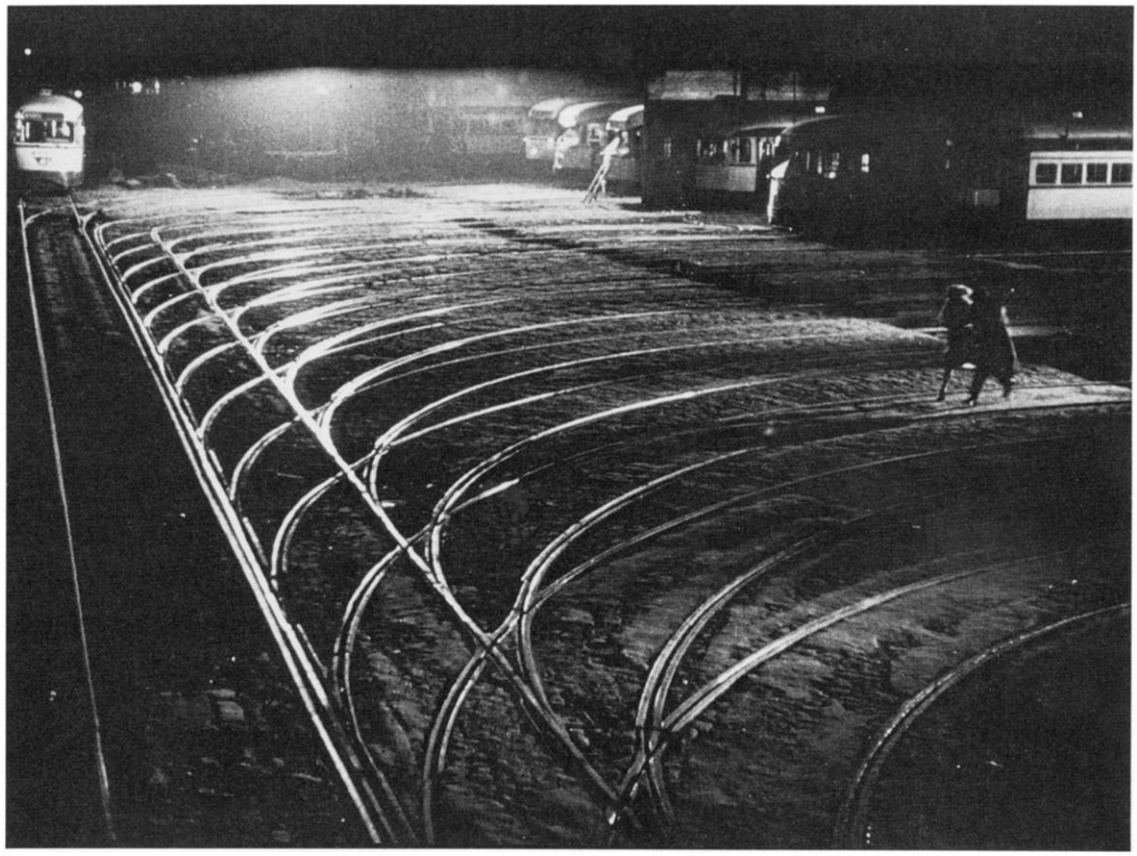
see from the name, was an Indian himself, so it is obvious he would portray Indians favorably. So did I, although I am not Indian myself. Theirs has been an important struggle for me, and their fair portrayal a major focus of the vast majority of my films, regardless of whose script I was photographing. "El Indio" had a profound sense of the people and a great sense for locations, which we usually scouted together. He really knew a great deal about Mexican culture.

Did you ever talk with him about the Revolution, its gains, its losses, about how or why to portray it?

Never. We never discussed the films, nor the scripts for that matter. "El Indio" would not allow it. He knew exactly what he wanted to do and that was that. Let me give you an example. The worst film Emilio Fernández ever made was shot in Patagonia, Tierra de Fuego, Argentina. It was called *La tierra de fuego se apaga* [*The Land of Fire Is Dying*, 1955]. That was the only script I did not read beforehand. "El Indio" handed it to me when we were already on the airplane. The ride from Buenos Aires to Patagonia alone lasted twelve hours in those days. When we arrived, he asked me what I thought. "You don't have a film," I told him. "It has no conflict and a story without a conflict is not a story." He argued and argued, but finally agreed to fix it. His idea of fixing it, however, was to include a collective wedding of fifty couples from nearby towns, where they were expected to read out loud the matrimonial vows written by Melchor Ocampo. The text was completely unknown outside Mexico. It's an extremely long and boring thing read by law at every Mexican wedding. One has no choice but to put up with it when one is getting married; but why include it in the film? The producer almost had a fit. He was ready to hang himself. We begged Emilio to remove it, but he adamantly refused. "I have to impose these words throughout the Latin-American continent," he stubbornly argued. And he did, at his own expense.

His temperament is legendary. Did you get along well with him?

Yes, I got along with him very well. We never fought because I always made sure to leave after the second drink, so there was no opportunity to fight. Besides, our collaboration worked greatly to his advantage; he knew better than to get into a fight with



Víctimas del pecado (1950)

me. After about the twentieth film we did together, however, I began to notice that he was beginning to repeat himself, to repeat things that I did not like at all. Without saying anything explicitly, I slowly began to withdraw, eventually refusing to work with him altogether. He persisted for some time, bringing me scripts to read or proposing we do this or that film, before he finally accepted the fact that I was no longer willing to work with him. From then on it was downhill for him.

In 1948 you and Fernández made both Pueblerina *and* Salón México. *How did you arrive at the decision to move from portraying rural life before and after the Revolution, which had been your trademark, to portraying contemporary life in the city?*

At that point, Emilio had directed several films for CLASA Films. Salvador Elizondo, who was then their general manager, hired us to shoot *Salón México*. He was so interested in producing this film that he suggested the title himself. Fernández found the topic appealing and proceeded to work on the script, either alone or with someone else; I can no longer remember. Elizondo did not like his version at all and offered to pay someone else to draw up a new script. Mauricio Magadaleno was called in at that point, and the film was ready to go. *Salón México* is urban Mexico. *Víctimas del pecado* [*Victims of Sin*], which we shot one year later, had the same theme: Mexico City at night. The cinematography is stupendous. Some of the night shots, like the one of the bridge, which could well be Montmartre, are extraordinary. The low-angle shot of streetcar rails (above) was used for a Kodak mural that can still be seen at the Kodak museum in Los Angeles. There has recently been a remake of *Salón México* [by Mexican production company Telecine], but the story is completely different. The earlier film will be very difficult to surpass. When both films competed in Belgium, our *Salón México* won over *The Bicycle Thief*. My films have been selected over many other internationally recognized films, most made by the best directors. They won over *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Les Enfants du paradis*. I have received over 20 international prizes.

So you are probably not the least surprised by today's renewed interest in the films you shot over 50 years ago?

What is happening today is that the Mexican film industry can no longer afford to invest in good quality scripts. While in those days we worked with the best writers around, today, the best Latin-American writers, like Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa, charge one million dollars for the rights to their work. This is of course sheer madness, especially with the current decline in movie attendance. In Mexico alone, three-quarters of all movie theaters have been closed.

But for you, cinema is clearly an international phenomenon. . . .

My style is first and foremost nationalist.

And how would you describe a nationalist style?

Well, as Mexican, of course.

Why? What is it that makes your style Mexican?

Look at the cover of the issue of *Artes de México* devoted to my work [vol. 2, 1988]. No one could have ever shot such images in Hollywood; the interest was simply not there. My art, on the contrary, has Mexican nationalism engraved everywhere.

And that nationalism is completely related to the Revolution, to its values?

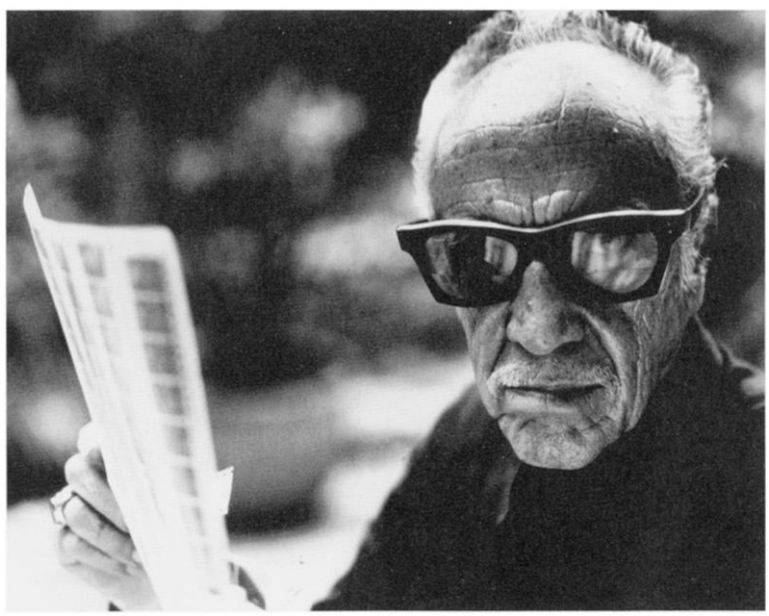
Exactly.

How do you explain that a national—even nationalist—cinema rooted in Mexican customs and traditions should have had such a great impact, both in Latin America and in the rest of the world?

Well, good nationalism becomes international. It does not stay at the level of little Mexico. My art is universal. The muralists used to say that I was the best muralist because my murals have travelled all over the world.

So in your opinion, what makes a film, any film, international in appeal?

As I already said, the most important aspect of a film is the story. If you don't have a good story you don't have a good film. Take, for example, two cases involving two geniuses. Orson Welles spent about one year with Toland in Brazil, shooting the carnival and other things without a script. He sent home some of the most beautiful footage ever seen in Hollywood. RKO congratulated him and asked to see the script. Welles replied that he had it written on his shirt sleeve. They told him to send his shirt to the cleaners and fired him; the film was never finished.[3] The same is true for Eisenstein, who also did not have a script when he went to film in Mexico. *¡Que Viva Mexico!* was a bad film because he never finished it; and he didn't finish it because he didn't have a script. Two geniuses, two failures.



Gabriel Figueroa today

If you had to give but one piece of advice to young film-makers, what would that be?

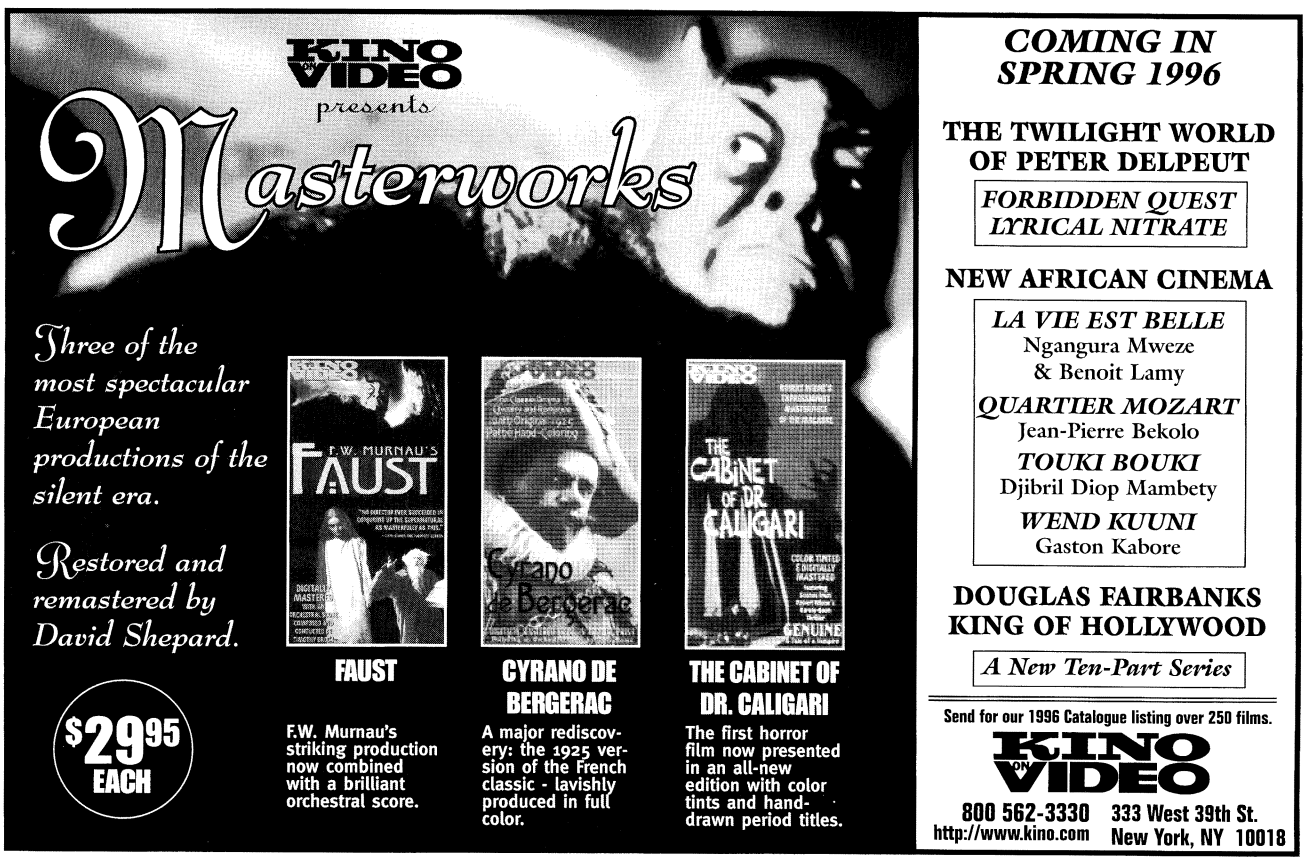
That they study the work of the great masters, especially the Flemish, Rembrandt and Vermeer, who studied lighting like no one else; also the Spaniards, Velázquez and Goya; and the Mexican muralists, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, David Alfaro Siqueiros, from whom I learned the latest innovations in pictorial art. My approach has always been to combine the styles of European and Mexican painters. That is the secret of my style.

■ Elena Feder is completing her dissertation on the construction of national identity in post-Revolutionary Mexican cinema at Stanford University.

Many thanks to Luis Rodríguez at Artes de México *in Mexico City and to Gabriel Figueroa Flores for their generous help in providing photographs.*

Notes

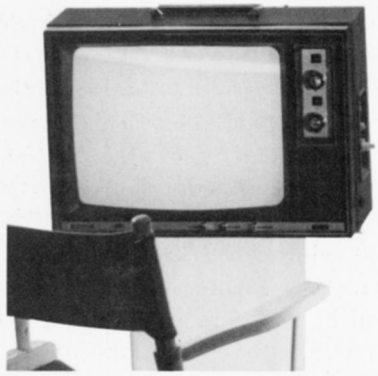
1. Acronym for Cinematográfica Latinoamericana, S. A. Figueroa's involvement in the film industry can be traced back to his collaboration with the Canadian-born cinematographer Alex Philips, for whom he did still photography on *Juárez y Maximiliano* (Miguel Contreras, 1933), *Profanación* and *Enemigos* (both Chano Urueta, 1933), *La sangre manda* (*Blood Is Thicker than Water*, José Bohr, 1933), and *Chucho el Roto* (Gabriel Soria, 1934). In 1934 he worked jointly with Victor Herrera on the cinematography for Chano Urueta's *El escándalo* (*The Scandal*), and with Alex Philips in Miguel Contreras's *Tribu* (*Tribe*).
2. *Colección Testimonios del Cine Mexicano* (Mexico: Universidades de Guadalajara & Colima, 1993). Forthcoming in English, Michael Donnelly, translator.
3. The footage is now included as part of a documentary, *It's All True* (Paramount Home Video). I am indebted to Julianne Burton-Carvajal for this reference.

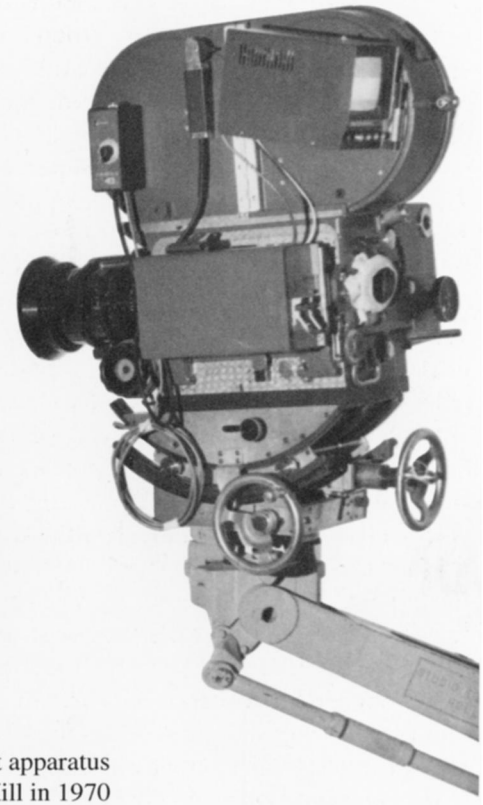


Through the Looking Glasses

Jean-Pierre Geuens

From the Camera Obscura to Video Assist





The original video assist apparatus put together by Bruce Hill in 1970

The studio is finally quiet. The actors are restless. The crew is ready. "Sound." "Camera." The slate is taken. A voice calls "Action." A voice? Is this really the director, "with his back to the actors,"[1] looking at the scene on a little video monitor? Isn't the director, at least the solid Hollywood professional of old, supposed to sit just next to the camera, facing the action? What's happening here?

Following the trajectory that led from the old-fashioned parallax viewfinders to the contemporary use of video-assist technology, I will argue that "looking through the camera" is never a transparent activity, that each configuration has distinctive features whose design and implementation resonate beyond the actual use of the device. In his still seminal essay "The Question Concerning Technology,"[2] Martin Heidegger warned us that "technology is no mere means,"[3] that the adoption of a new method of production often expresses more than the simple substitution of one tool by another. In Andrew Feenberg's words, "modern technology is no more neutral than medieval cathedrals or the Great Wall of China; it embodies the values of a particular civilization. . . ."[4] Herbert Marcuse is even more radical. For him, "specific purposes and interests of domination are not foisted upon technology 'subsequently' and from the outside; they enter the very construction of the technical apparatus.

Technology is always a historical social project: in it is projected what a society and its ruling interests intend to do with men and things."[5] Thus, as far as the camera is concerned, the very appearance of a novel gizmo could itself be significant of cultural or economic changes that have taken place in the film industry prior to the use of the new technology and, in turn, the actual practice of the supplemental device may help shape a different kind of cinema.

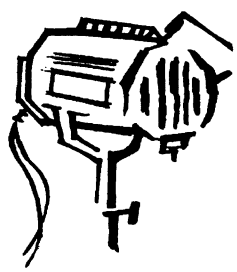
In the first years of cinema, getting access to the image that was to be recorded on film was no easy matter. The early cameras could never provide such necessary information. Indeed, not only the pioneer cameras of the 1890s and the 1900s but also the first truly professional cameras used by Hollywood—the Bell and Howell 2709 and the Mitchell Standard Model—had to resort to peeping holes, miscellaneous finders, magnifying tubes, swinging lens systems, and rack-over camera bodies to give any information at all about the image produced by the lens.[6] At best, the operators were allowed to survey the scene before or after actually shooting it. Crucially missing from their arsenal was the capability to check on exact framing, focusing, lighting, depth of field, and perspective while filming. Although a lens could be precisely focused on an actor's position ahead of time, what happened during the shot, especially if there was any movement, remained a mystery. The operators, in effect, were shooting blind. As they watched through the parallax viewfinder on the side of the camera, a device that produced but a pallid, lifeless, uninviting substitute for the real thing peeked at seconds earlier, they remained outsiders to what was truly going on inside the apparatus. In a way, the mystery of what happened inside the camera during the shooting acted as a synecdoche for the further magic that would be worked on the film in the lab, where it was to be chemically treated and its content at last exposed to view. Only at the screening of the dailies could one know for sure whether the scene was good or needed to be reshot. Such a daunting situtation therefore required steady professional types and, indeed, this is how the "operative cameramen" were described by their peers in the American Society of Cinematographers: "They must be ever on the watch that no unexpected or unplanned action by the players or background changes from the originally planned movement and lighting on the set, occur during shooting. They sit behind the camera, like the engineer at his throttle, ever watching for danger signals."[7] These brave men behind the camera, despite their vigilance, thus stood in a hermeneutic relation to their instrument. The otherness of the machine remained unassailed, its viewing apparatus a numinous, hermetic object standing as a third party between the operator and the world. The best one could do was stand next to the thing, maybe controlling its mishaps or its surges, but, throughout, acknowledging the actual film process as a thorough enigma.

The situation changed in 1936, when the Arnold and Richter Company of Germany introduced continuous reflex viewing with its new Arriflex 35mm camera. The solution was truly elegant: by mirroring the side of the shutter that was facing the lens and tilting it at a 45-degree angle, the light that was not used by the film when the latter was intermittently moving inside the camera was now made available to the operator for viewing purposes. Suddenly, the deficiencies that had marred the early camera systems were eliminated as operators, looking through the lens during the filming, gained maximum control over the images they were shooting. In fact, the smoothness of the Arriflex solution hid a paradox. Even though the operator may believe he or she sees what the film gets, technically speaking one never actually witnesses the same instant of time that is recorded on film because of the fluctuating movement of the shutter—when the operator gets the light, the film does not, and vice versa. More importantly, this means that the access to the lens is punctuated by the blinking presence/absence of the mirrored shutter. In my view, this flickering implies more than a simple technical chink; it radically transforms the linkage between the operator, the camera, and the world by literally embodying the eye within the technology of the apparatus itself.

Indeed, if we go back to the early years of still photography for a moment, there was always a sense of awe when the operator's head finally disappeared under a large black cloth in order to take the picture. "What do you have there: a girlfriend?" a model asked of Michael Powell's protagonist in *Peeping Tom* (1960), a comment that clearly exposes the prurience of the act. In a similar fashion, on the motion picture set, the view through the reflex viewfinder quickly became fetishized, the actual practice exceeding the useful aspect of checking on the parameters of the scene. Crew hierarchy determined who got to take a peek. Yet the static image one could witness when the

camera was at rest had finally little to do with what happened during the real shooting, when the operator alone received the full force of the system. Then the impact was truly stirring; due to the saccadic nature of the shutter's rotation, the effect on the eye was nothing less than phantasmagoric. Because the other eye of the operator remained closed during the filming, the flickering light on the ground glass became thoroughly hypnotic, even addictive.[8] For the time of the shot, with only one eye opened onto the phantastic spectacle on the little screen, the operator was very much lost in another world, a demimonde, a netherworld not unlike a dream screen for the wakened.

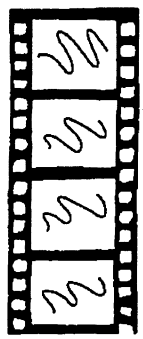
It is not so much that the frame provides for the operator a "synoptic center of the film's experience of the world it sees," as Vivian Sobchack has suggested,[9] but that what is being seen and the way it is seen combine in bringing forth a unique experience for the person at the camera. Let us consider for a moment the ramifications of what is actually taking place. A scene is rehearsed, then shot a number of times until the director declares him/herself satisfied. Through it all, the same general actions are performed with little change by the actors (basic gestures are duplicated, more or less the same lines enunciated) and the crew moves in sync with the action—a swinging of the boom that keeps abreast of an actor; a short dolly movement that accompanies an action; a dimming of the light level at the proper moment by an electrician; a change of focus by the camera assistant; and, for the operator, maybe a pan or other small readjustment that keeps the scene within the frame. What we have here, then, is no less than a ritual, a ceremony of sorts that also involves repetition, reenactment, and specific gestures carried out by "practitioners specially trained."[10] On a macro scale, the effect of a ritual is to bond a group, to create a sense of *communitas* when all participants find themselves sharing an experience. And, characteristically, this is a well-known effect experienced by all in a film crew as the constant repetition of specific actions, performed with only minimal variations, gives each member the sense both of cultic participation in a grand project and of sharing in a larger, collective identity. For the operator who most intimately experiences it all as an eye mesmerized by the spectacle on the little screen, the effect is even more hallucinatory. The sense of time is altered; there is no past or future any more, only a flux, a duration, an endless synchronic moment with actions many times repeated, an epiphany punctuated only by "eternal poses," to use Gilles Deleuze's descriptive words.[11] Because it stands outside mechanical time and physical space, the experience recalls the "oceanic" early moments of life. During that moment, the operator, neither here nor there, stands liminally between two worlds. As he or she merges, to some extent, with the phantom action on the little screen, a communion takes place that integrates the self within an ideal reality. Not surprisingly a certain *ekstase* can be reached. The effect then is not unlike that of a trance in a ritual, an experience that also momentarily transforms the individual. No wonder that, after the shot, different members of the crew turn toward the operator and ask: "How was it?"



Others have been sensitive to the reflex feature of the camera for distinct reasons as well. For instance, independent film-makers functioning simultaneously as directors and operators have worked both in fiction and in documentary. Among others, Nina Menkes, Ulrike Ottinger, and Werner Schroeter have always insisted on controlling the camera. In their kind of moviemaking, it makes a lot of sense not just to be present but also to participate in the moment of creation and help deliver the scene through the camera. For direct-cinema practitioners however (Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and Albert Maysles in the heyday of the movement), the situation is somewhat different. As the subject here belongs not to fiction but to the real world, and the situation, by choice, cannot be rehearsed, there is no question of experiencing a ritual. Instead, the filmmaker and the camera seem to merge into one persona that absorbs the scene and responds to it. For the Drew team, for instance, not only is the scene "unscripted, it's unrehearsed . . . for the first time the camera is a man. It sees, it hears, it moves like a man."[12] In other words, through its heartbeat, the pulse of its shutter, the camera now breathes as a human being. And the filmmaker, operating like the expert craftsperson of old, carves up the world for the benefit of the viewer, dereifying the structures of daily life, eventually revealing what was either unseen or just obscure moments before. In this case, therefore, the look through the camera functions very much as an example of what Heidegger refers to as *techne*, the Greek practice of the craftsperson which brings forth *poesis* through the

work. For Heidegger, the decisive factor is not the tool itself but the "unconcealment" of the world that results from its use.[13]

However, because the rigid division of labor in the Hollywood cinema forbids it, the typical director is almost never the person behind the camera (often sitting, instead, just underneath it). For him or her, therefore, nothing really changed in the substitution of the original apparatus by the reflex camera. The director remains exterior to the camera's process. After orchestrating everybody else's actions, the director gauges the results of the take instantly, *in vivo*, by gut instinct. Precisely because such directors do not look through a viewing screen during the filming, they literally function as metteurs-en-scène: their scene indeed is the stage, the space where fellow beings move about. What they must be sensitive to is the human intercourse at hand, the social space between people, the presence of objects as well as the flesh of the individuals. All the senses of a director are imbricated in this evaluation. Although the scene is shot in pieces and staged to be captured in a certain way on film, the dramatic action has a reality of its own. It is thus experienced by the director as (to borrow another notion from Heidegger) *Zuhandenheit*, the ready-at-hand, an involvement with the world through technique that actually supersedes the use of the equipment.[14] Expressly because the director is not looking through the camera, the technology associated with directing remains somewhat in the background, only a subordinate accessory. For Heidegger, what is experienced in this fashion is ontologically quite different from what could be observed through *Vorhandenheit*, the present-at-hand, the contemplation of a decontextualized subject matter. Directors functioning in the traditional mode thus depend mostly on human rather than exclusively cinematic skills: this does not feel right, that timing is a little off, this character would not really do that.



Furthermore, if we listen to Emmanuel Levinas for a moment, when a face-to-face encounter among human beings takes place, the contact involves more than a mere recording of an action by the eyes.[15] It embodies the most fundamental mode of being-in-the-world. A face, for Levinas, expresses the vulnerability of the being; it is an appeal, a call. The face solicits a human contact beyond cold rationality or calculative thinking. Its sheer presence impinges on the other person's autocratic tendencies. In this light, the director's "vision" of the scene becomes compounded by his/her own presence among the actors. Sharing a unique moment of time, the director becomes thoroughly wedded to the players as fellow human beings who carry their load of pain or distress. Can the director in these conditions (to recall well-known cases in our cinema) remain unaware of the wooden leg of one actor even if it remains off-camera? Can the director not respond to the cancer that is eating up this other actor? Even if we abandon these dramatic examples, is it really possible for the director to leave entirely behind the lunch shared with some actor, the conversations that went on, the hopes that were disclosed or the fears that were expressed? To go back to Heidegger, the director here does more than take a look (*Sicht*) at the scene professionally; emotion is involved as well (*Ruchsicht*), a look that involves sympathy, concern, and responsibility. Furthermore, the sharing of a human space and the mutual recognition that takes place between people automatically involve moral claims. One individual temporarily gives something of him/herself to another. Trust matters deeply. Ethics are involved. As a result, the director functions both as a participant in a shared exchange and as a shaman who guides others through a difficult process of shedding off. For such a director, the scene clearly takes place in front of his or her eyes, not behind where the camera is. After the take, the information that originates from the crew is certainly important, but it is purely technical in nature: did the action remain in focus, was the pan smooth, did the mike get in the shot, was the jolt to the dolly noticeable?

A radical departure to this long-standing mode of directing came about as a result of Jerry Lewis's introduction of video as a guide for the director to evaluate the quality of a take. There were of course good reasons for Lewis to do so: this was a logical solution to the problem of the actor/director, who was otherwise unable to check his performance. Buster Keaton would surely have been an ardent practitioner of the new technology. What Lewis did was elegant in its simplicity: he positioned a video camera as close as possible to the film camera, allowing him to view what he had just shot on playback. Although the technology was primitive and the equipment, at the time, heavy and cumbersome, Lewis persevered, and others eventually picked up on the idea. As early as 1968, some motion picture cameras that incorporated

plumbicon tubes in the viewfinder (thus splitting the light that normally would go to the operator alone), were used to film a tennis championship in Australia.[16] The next year, videotape playback was used in the film *Oliver!* (Carol Reed, 1968) to check on the lip sync or the movement of performers. If the tape showed the actor or dancer to be in sync after all, it saved the retake of a difficult and expensive dance number.[17] By most accounts though, credit for the integration of the video "camera" within the motion picture camera by means of a pellicle (a thin, partial mirror that split the light coming to the operator) goes to Bruce Hill, an engineer/tinkerer who had worked at Fairchild and Mitchell.[18] By 1970, working independently, Hill had modified a Mitchell BNCR and used a one-inch-videotape recording and playback system by Ampex. The subsequent image could be observed on a 17-inch monitor. A variation of this package was used for the helicopter sequences of *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin and Irwin Allen, 1974), the first time such a device was used by the Hollywood establishment.

Not surprisingly, directors shooting commercials were the first to embrace the new technique, for in their work in particular it is very important to check on the exact placement of a product in relation to many other coordinates. With the help of video, minute details could be discussed between representatives of the advertising agency and the technicians. Today, practically all commercial productions use video assist and playback on the set. In contrast, feature directors were distinctly slower in adopting the new apparatus: only 20 percent or so of the productions in the early 1980s used video assist. And although today most do, no more than 40 percent of the shoots bother with a playback system.[19]

On the surface, the use of video assist on the set provided only positive benefits for the director and the crew. For directors, being able to see the picture of the scene being rehearsed meant gaining back some of the control that historically had been lost to operators. For a crew, the advantages could be measured in terms of efficiency. During a shoot, questions keep flying to the operator: is the boom in the shot, where is the frame line, do I need to prop that area, are these people in the shot, how high do I need to light that wall, etc.? A lot of production time is lost as the operator attempts to make clear the parameters of the shot to the gaffer, the assistant director, the boom person, or the prop master. Once video assist becomes available and a large monitor is provided for the various crew members, all they have to do is look at it to answer their own question. In a similar fashion, the light split itself can be subdivided so as to provide a mini-image to the operator's assistant or the dolly grip. It might be more practical indeed for these technicians to look at an image on a monitor than to the scene itself to decide exactly when to initiate a rack focus or a dolly movement. All of these advantages end up saving time, and thus money, for the production.

There were, however, some technical mishaps that initially limited the appeal of the novel apparatus. The early grievances were mostly concerned with the disappearance of the director, who might be locked in a trailer loaded with equipment and who would communicate with the crew and actors only through a loudspeaker. Helen Hayes, for instance, was heard complaining about such a "disembodied voice" when working on *Raid on Entebbe* (Marvin Chomsky, 1977). And Garrett Brown grumbled that, when he was shooting the maze scene in *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), "Stanley mostly remained seated at the video screen, and we sent a wireless image from my camera out to an antenna on a ladder and thence to the recorder,"[20] in effect forcing Brown to go back and forth between the maze and the trailer, quite a distance away, just to find out if the take was good. That problem was eventually worked out when directors were able to use the monitor on the set itself. Another difficulty involved the operator: as the video system taps the light that would normally go to the eye of the camera person, a loss of clarity can be experienced by the operator, in effect making the job more difficult. One reason black-and-white taps have been traditionally preferred over color models is that the former could function with much less light intake compared to the latter. A new color tap though, the CEI Color IV, is said to be almost as economical as the black-and-white models and is thus gaining in popularity. Flickering was another "annoyance" that marred some of the viewing. But there are now new models, such as those factory-installed by Arriflex on its new 535 camera, which incorporate a totally flicker-free tap. Although more traditional directors of photography, such as Haskell Wexler, have indicated their preference for a video image that reproduces the flicker of the motion picture camera, most directors of photography shooting commercials go for the enhanced version, perhaps to soothe the apprehension of clients or agency people who might wonder about the misfiring on the monitor.[21] A fourth difficulty concerned the matching of the image received on the monitor to specific aspect ratios when shooting wide screen or when using an anamorphic lens. Here the solutions could be makeshift in nature (paper tape can be ap-

plied directly on the monitor so as to delimit the 1.85:1 aspect ratio), or electronic (monitors can now switch easily from a squeezed to an unsqueezed image). Finally, using videotape playback after each take may slow down the impetus of the crew because it interrupts everyone's activity—a situation that has limited the use of that particular technique. It might indeed be cheaper to redo a shot immediately than to break the momentum of the cast and crew. For this reason, videotape playback, when used at all, is looked at only after several takes have been shot so as to minimize the disruption.

Margo Meredith looking through the camera (*Winterset*, 1936)

Moving now from a technical to a cultural evaluation of video assist, we focus on its similarities to the camera obscura, a tool used by many painters in the seventeenth century to replace or supplement their own human viewpoint. Significantly, in both machines, the observer (the painter or the director) no longer confronts the world directly but looks instead at an image formed through an optical contraption. In other words, a mediation is taking place. If the technology remains transparent to its user, he or she, in the words of Svetlana Alpers, "is seen attending not to the world and its replication in [an] image, but to . . . the quirks of [a] device."[22] In his analysis of Vermeer's work, Daniel A. Fink has pointed to a number of optical phenomena directly related to the use of a camera obscura.[23] They are all consequential for the image being produced. For example, whereas in daily life the eye continually refocuses as it engages objects located at different distances, the camera obscura equipped with a lens forces the operator to view the scene through a single plane of focus, in effect making some objects sharper than others. Likewise, whereas Vermeer's contemporaries represented relatively large and sharp mirror images of objects, very much like the eyes would see them, Vermeer's own mirror reflections are comparatively small and slightly out of focus, as they would appear through a lens focused on a different plane. All in all, Fink points out ten such "distortions" introduced by the instrument used by Vermeer.

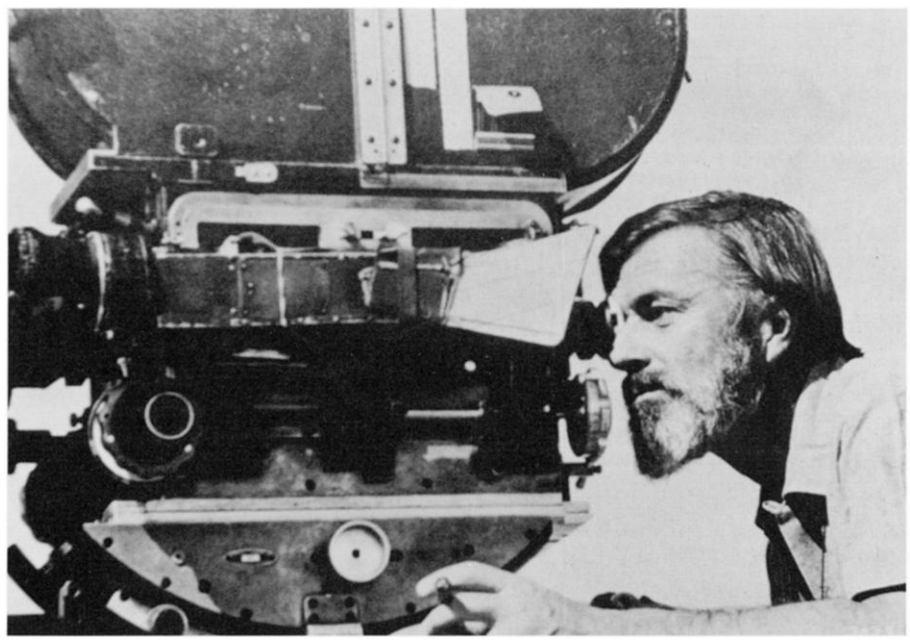
In the same manner, today, the limitations of video keep interfering with the work of directors of photography because of the differences between what is seen on the monitor and what will be in fact recorded on film. The main culprit here is the lack of resolution of the video image and the fact that its contrast ratio does not match that of the film stock. Shadow detail, for instance, does not show up on the monitor, a situation that inevitably creates doubt about the handling of the lighting scheme. For the same reason, directors have been known to complain when low light levels may simply make it too dark for them to see the expressions of the players on the monitor. And, when using color, everyone frets about the dif-

ferences between the colors on the set, those on the monitor, and those that will show up on film. In addition, directors of photography have noted that the usual size of the monitor (typically a 9-inch set) used by the director may also make it less likely that action will take place in the background in a long shot or even on the sides of the frame, as the miniaturized or peripheral action would not play well on such small screens. The action therefore often ends up enlarged and more centered. Beyond this, if the movie is going to be cut digitally, it makes little sense for the production to pay for regular film dailies. As a result, the director will not be aware of the large-screen effect of the film until it is prepared for release in the theaters: a definite drawback. Lastly, the fact that the scene is observed through video technology as opposed to film may have consequences of its own. Film images' fascinatingly rich appearance originates in the random distribution of the silver molecules on the film surface. Each individual frame in effect configures the subject slightly differently. When played back, the scene is reconstructed twenty-four times per second, bringing forth more "livingness" to the eye of the spectator than any single frame could provide on its own. In contrast to this, as Vivian Sobchack describes it, "electronic technology atomizes and abstractly schematizes the analogic quality of the photographic and cinematic into discrete pixels and bits of information that are then transmitted serially, . . . "[24] a design responsible for the "sameness" of the electronic image. In other words, a picture so constituted may not prompt the kind of investment associated with the older technology. And this in turn may produce a viewing situation for the director that demands quick renewal and change, shorter scenes, a point of view that Charles Eidsvik has described as "glance esthetics" in lieu of the older, more traditional "gaze esthetics."[25]

Looked at another way, employee relations on the set have also gone through a subtle restructuring. The operator is no longer the sole source of vision. Someone is now watching over the very guardian of the sight. The situation is not unlike a contemporary version of Taylorism, where work is carefully meted out into distinct components that can be precisely measured through scientific management techniques. Early in the century, for example, Frank Gilbreth, a disciple of Frederick Taylor, determined through the use of photographs a bricklayer's ideal working position. He then attempted to enforce this position on other bricklayers, thus hoping to eliminate minor but wasteful divergences from the more effective stand.[26] However, as work is rationalized and systematized, a subtle de-skilling of the worker's craft occurs. In fact, it is no longer trusted at face value, it is verified through technology until it matches very precisely the demands of management. Andrew Feenberg put it this way: whereas earlier "the craftsman possessed the knowledge required for his work as subjective capacity . . . mechanization transforms this knowledge into an objective power owned by another."[27] On the set then, the camera operator ceases to function as an independent agent who is counted on to execute a difficult move. He/she becomes merely the mechanical arm of the director. The operator, having lost some of the creativity associated with his/her own work, is thus transformed into a semiautomaton. The change eliminates the trust in someone's craft. It reinforces the industrial aspect of film-making, the manufacturing of a marketable commodity where the picture represents the surplus value of the labor performed by the operator.

Another characteristic shared by the camera obscura and video assist is the apparent objectivity and finality of the image they provide. Because the scene was captured by an optical device, the camera obscura's picture was thought to be necessarily truer to the model than that obtained through traditional human effort. In a similar fashion, the contemporary film director imagines gaining access to the truth of the scene when he or she abandons the actors and watches the take, no longer face-to-face from underneath the camera but indirectly on the monitor. After all, isn't this image the very picture that is being simultaneously recorded on film, the one that will be seen later by the viewers? As Jonathan Crary puts it, in each situation "the observer . . . is there as a disembodied witness to a mechanical and transcendental re-presentation of the objectivity of the world."[28] As a result, the camera obscura and video assist can be said to incorporate within their machinery the Cartesian ideal of the partition between pure body sensations and the mind, with the latter, the true self, inspecting the observations gleaned by the senses. Paul Ricoeur best described this mode of thinking when he called it "a vision of the world in which the whole of objectivity is spread out like a spectacle on which the cogito casts its sovereign gaze."[29] What is at stake here is the authority of an ideal observer, removed from the scene,

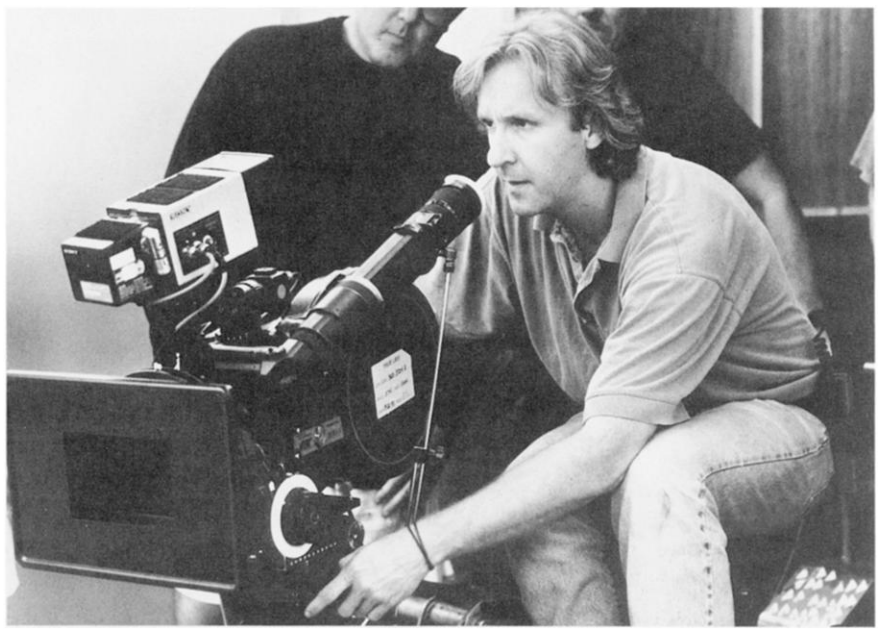
someone who is no longer operating as a body-in-the-world sharing a space/time continuum with the actors. The latter, instead, are objectified, appropriated for the director's use. As it plucks the scene out of that common, human context, video assist fragments the total experience specific to the traditional directing mode. What takes place in fact duplicates the calculative thinking of the traditional scientific experiment that first sets measurable goals for itself, then authenticates their presence in an ensuing test, thus "guaranteeing the certainty and the exactness"[30] of the project as a whole. Similarly, the contemporary director ends up verifying on the monitor what he/she expects to find there in the first place. The attention, in other words, is on what Heidegger called *Vorhandenheit*, the foregrounding of technology, of the actual, of what has been worked out during the rehearsals, at the expense of the film still as a project (his notion of *Zuhandenheit*, a potential, something not quite yet there, something that remains a becoming, that is still in flux. The present-at-hand, what is already there, takes precedent over what is still outstanding, what could still be created. A metaphysics of presence-through-the-image in effect dominates the day.



Conrad Hall behind the camera (*Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, 1969)

What I am suggesting here is that getting access to the image is not an automatic panacea for the director. To illustrate this point, let us look at two films produced and directed by Francis Ford Coppola. On the one hand, *Apocalypse Now* (1971) emerged from complete chaos and three years of shooting—perhaps the ultimate example of "how not to make a film"—a masterpiece. On the other hand, *One from the Heart* (1981) was conceived most rationally with the help of the latest electronic wizardry available at the time. From the very beginning of the production, an audiotape of the actors' read-through of the script was combined with storyboard images and temporary music to help the pre-visualization of the film as a whole. Polaroids of the actors' early rehearsals then replaced the drawings, followed by videotapes of the scenes shot on location in Las Vegas. As a result, long before a single foot of film was actually shot, "the whole movie could be seen at any time,"[31] by anyone involved in the film. Furthermore, when the film was ultimately shot in a Hollywood studio, Coppola could watch each take with music and sound effects. And he "was able, at the beginning of each production day, to view an edited version of the previous day's shooting, complete with music and sound effects."[32] The idea was to be able to handle immediately any kink in a scene, any difficulty with the pacing within or between scenes. As each segment of the project could be looked at, analyzed, dissected, film-making in effect became a totally rational enterprise, with the director-engineer at the helm calculating, quantifying, mastering the impact of each and every effect. This total

involvement with the ever-present image, the absolute elimination of the mystery of shooting, should have produced the most successful film ever. What Coppola forgot though, in his all-out effort at demagicizing the film process, is that, paraphrasing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the director's "vision is not a view upon the 'outside,' a merely physical-optical relation with the world."[33] No more than a poem can be said to exist in the words per se, a film does not reside solely in an image that can be observed on a little screen. During the shooting, it remains instead a becoming, an opening, a possibility that may or may not be realized later on. A film, in other words (still paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty), is as much in the "intervals" between images as it is in the pictures themselves.[34] Fleeing the mystery of creation, the challenges and the claims involved in a face-to-face transaction, the contemporary director thus functions as a distant subject who masters and objectifies others through the supremacy of technique. The lingering of the body in time and space has been replaced by what Nietzsche called an Apollonian frenzy with the eye.[35] The mise-en-scène has turned into mere mise-en-image, a soulless play of isolated, context-free commodities.



James Cameron looking at the video assist (*True Lies*, 1994)

Technology must never be accepted at face value. It is not because the science is there that the invention or the use of a machine will automatically follow suit. And not all novel techniques are successfully adopted by the practitioners in the field. One cannot, David F. Noble reminds us, ever simply state that the best existing technology is automatically being used at all times. Instead, we must always replace that assumption with more probing questions: " The best technology? Best for whom? Best for what? Best according to what criteria, what visions, according to whose criteria, whose visions?"[36] Hence, insofar as video assist is concerned, what are the historical conditions that made its use so widespread? When Jerry Lewis used it there was little interest on the part of other directors to emulate him. Yet, not so many years afterward, in remarkable unison, most American directors ended up adopting his method. What happened in between that brought about this radical change? The answer lies in what Charles Eidsvik has called "the film's industry's defensive maneuvers of the 1970s and the 1980s,"[37] when, to repel the thrust of both television as a competing source of entertainment and videotape as a contending recording medium, changes were made in the kind of cinema that was produced. The writing in effect pushed the plots "into areas in which video could not compete as well. . . ."[38] Practically speaking, this meant that the small movies, the psychological films, the non-action pictures, were abandoned to television. Conversely, the theatrical experience was redefined as the larger-than-life action

spectacle. Although Eidsvik identifies location film-making as the main beneficiary of these changes, location per se did not prove itself enough of a draw to sell the real movie in the theater over the TV movie of the week. More was needed, and camera pyrotechnics were quickly enlisted to divert and bedazzle the spectator's eyes. These technological advances, however, also eroded the traditional control of the director on the set. First, the very mobility of the Steadicam created a dilemma for the director.[39] What was he or she supposed to do: run after the Steadicam operator or remain ineffectually behind? Second, the Louma crane isolated the camera at the extreme end of its reach, all the time maneuvered from afar by an operator working at a console. Third, cable contraptions of one type or another followed, flying the camera far above the scene. Fourth, helicopters equipped with gyrostabilized systems further extended the reach of the apparatus. Finally, the ease of digital technology pushed film-making toward ever more complex and demanding composite images. All in all, as the "scene" became less and less accessible, directors had no choice but look at a remote image on a video monitor.

"In choosing our technology," Feenberg suggests, "we become what we are, which in turn shapes our future choices."[40] And so it is that a scene that required an improbable camera position would also benefit from graphic action and various kinds of pyrotechnics, traditional or otherwise—all situations that incidentally also showed up best on the monitors. In other words, whereas it is unlikely that the cinema of Ingmar Bergman would have significantly benefited from the use of video assist, that of Jim Cameron or Robert Zemeckis makes little sense without it. In this type of film-making, in fact, the device itself is no more than an advanced representative of other, more intensive technologies that will later on enhance the surface appeal of the film in postproduction: digital-image processing, digital editing, digital sound enhancing, etc. And in turn this superior technology, this dazzling maneuverability, this extraordinary display of breathtaking technique is widely advertised, thus staking new claims for the global hegemony of Hollywood. The fire power of the contemporary American film may be less physically destructive than that of the old gunboat, but it nevertheless forces its superiority on the technologically backward national cinemas of Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, threatening their very survival.

For the new American director, however, success speaks for itself and money speaks best of all. Hence, no rejection of the power of technology should be expected. Needed or not, video assist is here to stay, not because it is necessarily the best tool for the job, but because, more than ever, we implicitly trust a machine more than ourselves to tell us about the world. As the objectification of the world through the domination of technique is pushed one notch further, the *cogito* of old can be said to have been given a more contemporary twist: *video, ergo est.*

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Notes

1. This attack was made twice by directors of photography during the "New Perspectives" seminar sponsored by the American Society of Cinematographers and Eastman Kodak Worldwide Student Program at the University of Southern California on February 18, 1995. Although the charge might have been exaggerated for the sake of effect, no one on the panel bothered to soften it.
2. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," trans. William Lovitt, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1977), pp. 283–317.
3. Heidegger, p. 294.
4. Andrew Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. v.
5. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 224.
6. I am very grateful to Wesley Lambert, who showed me his marvelous collection of antique cameras and spent much time pointing out the different viewing devices in use.
7. Gib., "Close-Ups: Guy Bennett: Operative Cameraman," *International Photographer*, vol. 11, no. 3 (April 1939), p. 5.
8. The effect I am describing in this essay is unique to cameras equipped with a mirrored shutter. The look through the lens is certainly less fascinating when shooting with a camera designed with a partial mirror that splits the light before it reaches the shutter, thus providing an uninterrupted flow to the operator.
   As for operators shooting with their other eye closed, an informal survey with camera instructors at USC (Woody Omens and John Morrill, among others) revealed an operating difference between fiction and documentary work. Most operators prefer to shoot narratives with the other eye shut so as to concentrate on the scene in the viewfinder with, from time to time, a quick check toward an actor about to enter the frame, a car that may be getting too

close, or the bustling of the focus puller. In documentaries, however, the consensus is that an operator should keep the other eye open so as to be aware of what is happening in the field at all times.

9. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 134.
10. Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 70.
11. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 7.
12. In A. William Bluem, *Documentary in American Television* (New York: Hastings House, 1965), p. 194.
13. For Heidegger's full argument, see "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, pp. 287–317.
14. In Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1962), chap. 4.
15. For Emmanuel Levinas's ideas, check his *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
16. See Stan Meredith, "The Electronic-Cam System," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 49, no. 4 (April 1968).
17. In David Samuelson, "Electronic Aids to Film Making," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 50, no. 8 (August 1969).
18. I am indebted to Lindsay Hill of Hill Production Services for information about his father and his research.
19. I am truly grateful to Terry Clairmont of Clairmont Camera for sharing with me his knowledge of the industry's reaction to the introduction of video assist technology.
20. Garrett Brown, "The Steadicam and *The Shining*," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 61, no. 8 (August 1980), p. 853.
21. In James B. Brandt, "Video Assist: Past, Present and Future," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 72, no. 6 (June 1991).
22. Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the 17th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 31.
23. → Daniel A. Fink, "Vermeer's Use of the Camera Obscura—A Comparative Study," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 53, no. 4 (December 1971), pp. 493–505.
24. Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence,'" in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 100.
25. Charles Eidsvik, "Machines of the Invisible: Changes in Film Technology and the Age of Video," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Winter 1988–89), p. 21.
26. See Milton J. Nadworny, *Scientific Management and the Unions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 54 ff.
27. Feenberg, p. 27.
28. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 41.
29. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, trans. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 236.
30. William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technology: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), p. 191.
31. Thomas Brown, "The Electronic Camera Experiment," in *American Cinematographer*, vol. 63, no. 1 (January 1982), p. 76.
32. Brown, p. 79.
33. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 181.
34. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 48.
35. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 519.
36. David F. Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 145.
37. Eidsvik, p. 22.
38. Eidsvik, p. 22.
39. On the subject of the Steadicam, see my article "Visuality and Power: The Work of the Steadicam," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 8–17.
40. Feenberg, p. 14.

American Vision

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Stephen Prince

True Lies

Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory

Digital compositing in *Forrest Gump*

Digital imaging technologies are rapidly transforming nearly all phases of contemporary film production. Film-makers today storyboard, shoot, and edit their films in conjunction with the computer manipulation of images. For the general public, the most visible application of these technologies lies in the new wave of computer-generated and -enhanced special effects that are producing images—the watery creature in *The Abyss* (1989) or the shimmering, shape-shifting *Terminator 2* (1991)—unlike any seen previously.

The rapid nature of these changes is creating problems for film theory. Because the digital manipulation of images is so novel and the creative possibilities it offers are so unprecedented, its effects on cinematic representation and the viewer's response are poorly understood. Film theory has not yet come to terms with these issues. What are the implications of computer-generated imagery for representation in cinema, particularly for concepts of photographically based realism? How might theory adapt to an era of digital imaging?

Initial applications of special-effects digital imaging in feature films began more than a decade ago in productions like *Tron* (1982), *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), and *The Last Starfighter* (1984). The higher-profile successes of *Terminator 2*, *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *Forrest Gump* (1994), however, dramatically demonstrated the creative and remunerative possibilities of computer-generated imagery (CGI).

Currently, two broad categories of digital imaging exist. Digital-image processing covers applications

like removing unwanted elements from the frame—hiding the wires supporting the stunt performers in *Cliffhanger* (1994), or erasing the Harrier jet from shots in *True Lies* (1994) where it accidentally appears. CGI proper refers to building models and animating them in the computer. Don Shay, editor of *Cinefex*, a journal that tracks and discusses special-effects work in cinema, emphasizes these distinctions between the categories.[1]

As a consequence of digital imaging, *Forrest Gump* viewers saw photographic images of actor Gary Sinise, playing Gump's amputee friend and fellow Vietnam veteran, being lifted by a nurse from a hospital bed and carried, legless, through three-dimensional space. The film viewer is startled to realize that the representation does not depend on such old-fashioned methods as tucking or tieing the actor's limbs behind his body and concealing this with a loose-fitting costume. Instead, Sinise's legs had been digitally erased from the shot by computer.

Elsewhere in the same film, viewers saw photographic images of President Kennedy speaking to actor Tom Hanks, with dialogue scripted by the film's writers. In the most widely publicized applications of CGI, viewers of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* watched photographic images of moving, breathing, and chomping dinosaurs, images which have no basis in any photographable reality but which nevertheless seemed realistic. In what follows, I will be assuming that viewers routinely make assessments about the perceived realism of a film's images or characters, even when these are obviously fictionalized or otherwise impossible. Spielberg's dinosaurs made such a huge impact on viewers in part because they seemed far more life-like than the miniature models and stop-motion animation of previous generations of film.

The obvious paradox here—creating credible photographic images of things which cannot be photographed—and the computer-imaging capabilities which lie behind it challenge some of the traditional assumptions about realism and the cinema which are embodied in film theory. This essay first explores the challenge posed by CGI to photographically based notions of cinematic realism. Next, it examines some of the problems and challenges of creating computer imagery in motion pictures by drawing on interviews with computer-imaging artists. Finally, it develops an alternate model, based on perceptual and social correspondences, of how the cinema communicates and is intelligible to viewers. This model may produce a better integration of the tensions between realism and formalism in film theory. As we will see, theory has construed realism solely as a matter of reference rather than as a matter of perception as well. It has neglected what I will term in this essay "perceptual realism." This neglect has prevented theory from understanding some of the fundamental ways in which cinema works and is judged credible by viewers.

Assumptions about realism in the cinema are frequently tied to concepts of indexicality prevailing between the photographic image and its referent. These, in turn, constitute part of the bifurcation between realism and formalism in film theory. In order to understand how theories about the nature of cinematic images may change in the era of digital-imaging practices, this bifurcation and these notions of an indexically based film realism need to be examined.

This approach to film realism—and it is, perhaps, the most basic theoretical understanding of film realism—is rooted in the view that photographic images, unlike paintings or line drawings, are indexical signs: they are causally or existentially connected to their referents. Charles S. Peirce, who devised the triadic model of indexical, iconic, and symbolic signs, noted that "Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent . . . they . . . correspond point by point to nature. In that respect then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection."[2]

In his analysis of photography, Roland Barthes noted that photographs, unlike every other type of image, can never be divorced from their referents. Photograph and referent "are glued together."[3] For Barthes, photographs are causally connected to their referents. The former testifies to the presence of the latter. "I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens without which there would be no photograph."[4] For Barthes, "Every photograph is a certificate of presence."[5]

Because cinema is a photographic medium, theorists of cinema developed concepts of realism in connection with the indexical status of the photographic sign. Most famously, André Bazin based his realist aesthetic on what he regarded as the "objective" nature of photography, which bears the mechanical trace of its referents. In a well-known passage, he wrote, "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space which

govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model."[6]

Other important theorists of film realism emphasized the essential attribute cinema shares with photography of being a recording medium. Siegfried Kracauer noted that his theory of cinema, which he subtitled "the redemption of physical reality," "rests upon the assumption that film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with that medium a marked affinity for the visible world around us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality."[7] Like Bazin, Stanley Cavell emphasized that cinema is the screening or projection of reality because of the way that photography, whether still or in motion, mechanically (that is, automatically) reproduces the world before the lens.[8]

Jurassic Park:
not the real T. Rex

For reasons that are alternately obvious and subtle, digital imaging in its dual modes of image processing and CGI challenges indexically based notions of photographic realism. As Bill Nichols has noted, a digitally designed or created image can be subject to infinite manipulation.[9] Its reality is a function of complex algorithms stored in computer memory rather than a necessary mechanical resemblance to a referent. In cases like the slithery underwater creature in James Cameron's *The Abyss*, which began as a wireframe model in the computer, no profilmic referent existed to ground the indexicality of its image. Nevertheless, digital imaging can anchor pictured objects, like this watery creature, in apparent photographic reality by employing realistic lighting (shadows, highlights, reflections) and surface texture detail (the creature's rippling responses to the touch of one of the film's live actors). At the same time, digital imaging can bend, twist, stretch, and contort physical objects in cartoonlike ways that mock indexicalized referentiality. In an Exxon ad, an automobile morphs into a tiger, and in a spot for Listerine, the CGI bottle of mouthwash jiggles, expands, and contracts in an excited display of enthusiasm for its new formula.[10]

In these obvious ways, digital imaging operates according to a different ontology than do indexical photographs. But in less obvious ways, as well, digital imaging can depart from photographically coded realism. Objects can be co-present in computer space but not in the physical 3D space which photography records. When computer-animated objects move around in a simulated space, they can intersect one another. This is one reason why computer animators start with wireframe models which they can rotate and see through in order to determine whether the model is intersecting other points in the simulated space. Computer-simulated environments, therefore, have to be programmed to deal with the issues of collision detection and collision response.[11]

The animators who created the herd of gallimimus that chases actor Sam Neill and two children in *Jurassic Park* were careful to animate the twenty-four gallis so they would look like they might collide and were reacting to that possibility.[12] First, they had to ensure that no gallis actually did pass into and through one another, and then they had to simulate the collision responses in the creatures' behaviors as if they were corporeal beings subject to Newtonian space.

As moving photographic images, Spielberg's dinosaurs are referentially fictional

In other subtle ways, digital imaging can fail to perform Kracauer's redemption of physical reality. Lights simulated in the computer don't need sources, and shadows can be painted in irrespective of the position of existing lights. Lighting, which in photography is responsible for creating the exposure and the resulting image, is, for computer images, strictly a matter of painting, of changing the brightness and coloration of individual pixels. As a result, lighting in computer imagery need not obey the rather fixed and rigid physical conditions which must prevail in order for photographs to be created.

One of the more spectacular digital images in *True Lies* is a long shot of a chateau nestled beside a lake and surrounded by the Swiss Alps. The image is a digital composite, blending a mansion from Newport, Rhode Island, water shot in Nevada, and a digital matte painting of the Alps.[13] The compositing was done by Digital Domain, a state-of-the-art effects house created by the film's director, James Cameron. The shot is visually stunning—crisply resolved, richly saturated with color, and brightly illuminated across Alps, lake, and chateau.

Kevin Mack, a digital effects supervisor at Digital Domain who worked on *True Lies* as well as *Interview with the Vampire*, points out that the image is unnaturally luminant.[14] Too much light is distributed across the shot. If a photographer exposed for the lights in the chateau, the Alps would film too dark, and, conversely, if one exposed for the Alps in, say, bright moonlight, the lights in the chateau would burn out. The chateau and the Alps could not be lit so they'd both expose as brightly as they do in the image. Mack points out that the painted light effects in the shot are a digital manipulation so subtle that most viewers probably do not notice the trickery.

Like lighting, the rendering of motion can be accomplished by computer painting. President Kennedy speaking to Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump* resulted from two-dimensional painting, made to look like 3D, according to Pat Byrne, Technical Director at Post Effects, a Chicago effects house that specializes in digital imaging.[15] The archival footage of Kennedy, once digitized, was repainted with the proper phonetic mouth movements to match the scripted dialogue and with highlights on his face to simulate the corresponding jaw and muscle changes. Morphs were used to smooth out the different painted configurations of mouth and face.[16]

When animating motion via computer, special adjustments must be made precisely because of the differences between photographically captured reality and the synthetic realities engineered with CGI. Credible computer animation requires the addition of motion blur to simulate the look of a photographic image. The ping-pong ball swatted around by Forrest Gump and his Chinese opponents was animated on the computer from a digitally scanned photographic model of a ping-pong ball and was subsequently composited into the live-action footage of the game (the game itself was shot without any ball). The CGI ball seemed credible because, among other reasons, the animators were careful to add motion blur, which a real, rapidly moving object passing in front of a camera will possess (as seen by the camera which freezes the action as a series of still frames), but which a key-framed computer animated object does not.

In these ways, both macro and micro, digital imaging possesses a flexibility that frees it from the indexicality of photography's relationship with its referent.[17] Does this mean, then, that digital-imaging capabilities ought not be grouped under the rubric of a realist film theory? If not, what are the alternatives? What kind of realism, if any, do these images possess?

In traditional film theory, only one alternative is available: the perspective formulated in opposition to the positions staked out by realists like Kracauer, Bazin, and Cavell. This position, which might be termed the formalist outlook, stresses cinema's capacity for reorganizing, and even countering and falsifying, physical reality. Early exponents of such a position include Rudolf Arnheim, Dziga Vertov, and Sergei Eisenstein. In his discussion of classical film theory, Noël Carroll has pointed out this bifurcation

between the camps of realism and formalism and linked it to an essentializing tendency within theory, a predilection of theorists to focus on either the cinema's capability to photographically copy physical reality or to stylistically transcend that reality.[18]

This tension in classical theory between stressing the ways film either records or reorganizes profilmic reality continues in contemporary theory, with the classical formalist emphasis upon the artificiality of cinema structure being absorbed into theories of the apparatus, of psychoanalysis, or of ideology as applied to the cinema. In these cases, cinematic realism is seen as an *effect* produced by the apparatus or by spectators positioned within the Lacanian Imaginary. Cinematic realism is viewed as a discourse *coded* for transparency such that the indexicality of photographic realism is replaced by a view of the "reality-effect" produced by codes and discourse. Jean-Louis Baudry suggests that "Between 'objective reality' and the camera, site of inscription, and between the inscription and the projection are situated certain operations, a *work* which has as its result a finished product."[19] Writing about the principles of realism, Colin McCabe stresses that film is "constituted by a set of discourses which . . . produce a certain reality."[20]

Summarizing these views, Dudley Andrew explains, "The discovery that resemblance is coded and therefore learned was a tremendous and hard-won victory for semiotics over those upholding a notion of naive perception in cinema."[21] Where classical film theory was organized by a dichotomy between realism and formalism, contemporary theory has preserved the dichotomy even while recasting one set of its terms. Today, indexically based notions of cinema realism exist in tension with a semiotic view of the cinema as discourse and of realism as one discourse among others.

In some of the ways just discussed, digital imaging is inconsistent with indexically based notions of film realism. Given the tensions in contemporary film theory, should we then conclude that digital-imaging technologies are necessarily illusionistic, that they construct a reality-effect which is merely discursive? They do, in fact, permit film artists to create synthetic realities that can look just like photographic realities. As Pat Byrne noted, "The line between real and not-real will become more and more blurred."[22] How should we understand digital imaging in theory? How should we build theory around it? When faced with digitized images, will we need to discard entirely notions of realism in the cinema?

The tensions within film theory can be surmounted by avoiding an essentializing conception of the cinema stressing unique, fundamental properties[23] and by employing, in place of indexically based notions of film realism, a correspondence-based model of cinematic representation. Such a model will enable us to talk and think about both photographic images and computer-generated images and about the ways that cinema can create images that seem alternately real and unreal. To develop this approach, it will be necessary to indicate, first, what is meant by a correspondence-based model and, then, how digital imaging fits within it.

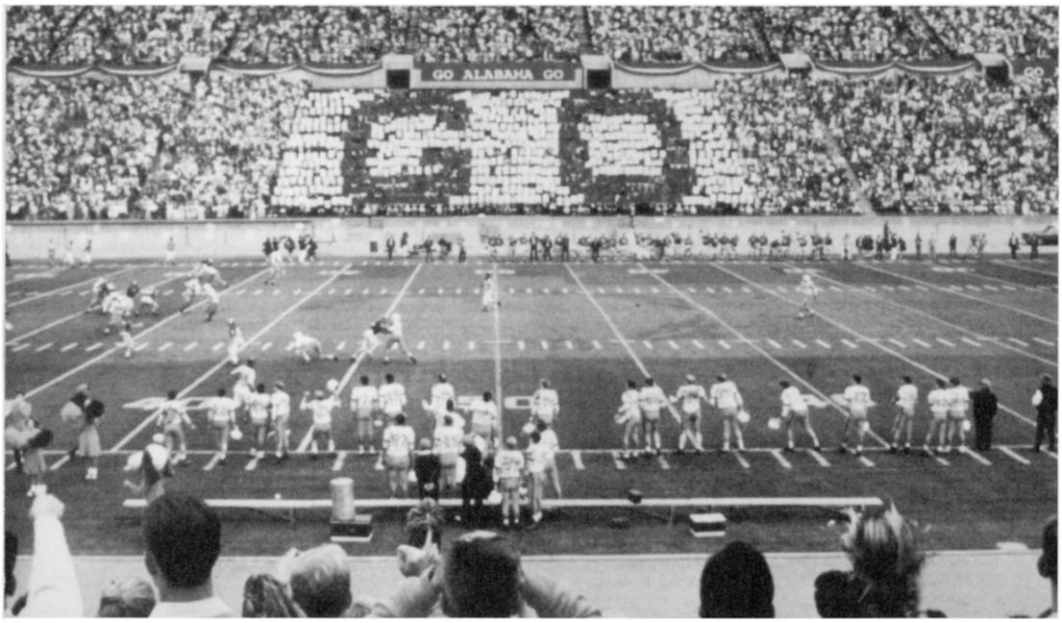
An extensive body of evidence indicates the many ways in which film spectatorship builds on correspondences between selected features of the cinematic display and a viewer's real-world visual and social experience.[24] These include iconic and non-iconic visual and social cues which are structured into cinematic images in ways that facilitate comprehension and invite interpretation and evaluation by viewers based on the salience of represented cues or patterned deviations from them. At a visual level, these cues include the ways that photographic images and edited sequences are isomorphic with their corresponding real-world displays (e.g., through replication of edge and contour information and of monocular distance codes; in the case of moving pictures, replication of motion parallax; and in the case of continuity editing, the creation of a screen geography with coherent coordinates through the projective geometry of successive camera positions). Under such conditions, empirical evidence indicates that naive viewers readily recognize experientially familiar pictured objects and can comprehend filmed sequences, and that continuity editing enhances such comprehension.[25]

At the level of social experience, the evidence indicates that viewers draw from a common stock of moral constructs and interpersonal cues and percepts when evaluating both people in real life and represented characters in the media. Socially derived assumptions about motive, intent, and proper role-based behavior are employed when responding to real and media-based personalities and behavior.[26] As communication scholars Elizabeth Perse and Rebecca Rubin have pointed out, "'people' constitutes a construct domain that may be sufficiently permeable to include both interpersonal and [media] contexts."[27]

Recognizing that cinematic representation oper-

ates significantly, though not exclusively, in terms of structured correspondences between the audiovisual display and a viewer's extra-filmic visual and social experience enables us to ask about the range of cues or correspondences within the image or film, how they are structured, and the ways a given film patterns its represented fictionalized reality around these cues. What kind of transformations does a given film carry out upon the correspondences it employs with viewers' visual and social experience? Attributions of realism, or the lack thereof, by viewers will inhere in the ways these correspondences are structured into and/or transformed by the image and film. Instead of asking whether a film is realistic or formalistic, we can ask about the kinds of linkages that connect the represented fictionalized reality of a given film to the visual and social coordinates of our own three-dimensional world, and this can be done for both "realist" and "fantasy" films alike. Such a focus need not reinstate indexicality as the ground of realism, since it can emphasize falsified correspondences and transformation of cues. Nor need such a focus turn everything about the cinema back into discourse, into an arbitrarily coded reorganization of experience. As we will see, even unreal images can be perceptually realistic. Unreal images are those which are referentially fictional. The Terminator is a represented fictional character that lacks reference to any category of being existing outside the fiction. Spielberg's dinosaurs obviously refer to creatures that once existed, but as *moving photographic images* they are referentially fictional. No dinosaurs now live which could be filmed doing things the fictionalized creatures do in *Jurassic Park*. By contrast, referentially realistic images bear indexical and iconic homologies with their referents. They resemble the referent, which, in turn, stands in a causal, existential relationship to the image.[28]

A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space. Perceptually realistic images correspond to this experience because film-makers build them to do so. Such images display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, color, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond with the viewer's own understanding of these phenomena in daily life. Perceptual realism, therefore, designates a relationship between the image or film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images and those which are referentially realistic. Because of this, unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic.



Forrest Gump:
computer-generated crowd

We should now return to, and connect this discussion back to, the issue of digital imaging. When lighting a scene becomes a matter of painting pixels, and capturing movement is a function of employing the correct algorithms for mass, inertia, torque, and speed (with the appropriate motion blur added as part of the mix), indexical referencing is no longer required for

the appearance of photographic realism in the digital image. Instead, Gump's ping-pong ball and Spielberg's dinosaurs look like convincing photographic realities because of the complex sets of perceptual correspondences that have been built into these images. These correspondences, which anchor the computer-generated image in apparent three-dimensional space, routinely include such variables as surface texture, color, light, shadow, reflectance, motion speed and direction.

Embedding or compositing computer imagery into live action, as occurs when Tom Hanks as Gump "hits" the CG ping-pong ball or when Sam Neill is "chased" by the CG gallimimus herd, requires matching both environments. The physical properties and coordinates of the computer-generated scene components must be made to correspond with those of the live-action scene. Doing this requires precise and time-consuming creation and manipulation of multiple 3D perceptual cues. Kevin Mack, at Digital Domain, and Chris Voellmann, a digital modeller and animator at Century III Universal Studios, point out that light, texture, and movement are among the most important cues to be manipulated in order to create a synthetic reality that looks as real as possible.[29]

To simulate light properties that match both environments, a digital animator may employ scan-line algorithms that calculate pixel coloration one scan line at a time, ray tracing methods that calculate the passage of light rays through a modelled environment, or radiosity formulations that can account for diffuse, indirect illumination by analyzing the energy transfer between surfaces.[30] Such techniques enable a successful rendering[31] of perceptual information that can work to match live-action and computer environments and lend credence and a sense of reality to the composited image such that its computerized components *seem* to fulfill the indexicalized conditions of photographic realism. When the velociraptors hunt the children inside the park's kitchen in the climax of *Jurassic Park*, the film's viewer sees their movements reflected on the gleaming metal surfaces of tables and cookware. These reflections anchor the creatures inside Cartesian space and perceptual reality and provide a bridge between live-action and computer-generated environments. In the opening sequence of *Forrest Gump*, as a CG feather drifts and tumbles through space, its physical reality is enhanced by the addition of a digitally painted reflection on an automobile windshield.

To complete this anchoring process, the provision of information about surface texture and movement is extremely important and quite difficult, because the information provided must seem credible. Currently, many of the algorithms needed for convincing movement either do not exist or are prohibitively expensive to run on today's computers. The animators and renderers at Industrial Light and Magic used innovative software to texture-map[32] skin and wrinkles onto their dinosaurs and calibrated variations in skin jostling and wrinkling with particular movements of the creatures. However, while bone and joint rotation are successfully visualized, complex information about the movement of muscles and tendons below the skin surface is lacking.

Kevin Mack describes this limit in present rendering abilities as the "human hurdle"[33]—that is, the present inability of computers to fully capture the complexities of movement by living organisms. Hair, for example, is extremely difficult to render because of the complexities of mathematically simulating properties of mass and inertia for finely detailed strands.[34] Chris Voellmann points out that today's software can create flexors and rotators but cannot yet control veins or muscles.

Multiple levels of information capture must be successfully executed to convincingly animate and render living movement because the viewer's eye is adept at perceiving inaccurate information.[35] These levels include locomotor mechanics—the specification of forces, torques, and joint rotations. In addition, "gait-specific rules"[36] must be specified. The *Jurassic Park* animators, for example, derived gait-specific rules for their dinosaurs by studying the movements of elephants, rhinos, komodo dragons, and ostriches and then making some intelligent extrapolations. Beyond these two levels of information control is the most difficult one—capturing the expressive properties of movement. Human and animal movement cannot look mechanical and be convincing; it must be expressive of mood and affect.

As the foregoing discussion indicates, available software and the speed and economics of present computational abilities are placing limits on the complexities of digitally rendered 3D cues used to integrate synthetic and live-action objects and environments. But the more important point is that present abilities to digitally simulate perceptual cues about surface texture, reflectance, coloration, motion, and distance provide an extremely powerful means of "gluing" together synthetic and live-action environments and of furnishing the viewer with an internally unified and coherent set of cues that establish correspondences with the properties of physical space and living sys-

tems in daily life. These correspondences in turn establish some of the most important criteria by which viewers can judge the apparent realism or credibility possessed by the digital image.

Digital imaging exposes the enduring dichotomy in film theory as a false boundary

Obvious paradoxes arise from these judgements. No one has seen a living dinosaur. Even paleontologists can only hazard guesses about how such creatures might have moved and how swiftly. Yet the dinosaurs created at ILM have a palpable reality about them, and this is due to the extremely detailed texture-mapping, motion animation, and integration with live action carried out via digital imaging. Indexicality cannot furnish us with the basis for understanding this apparent photographic realism, but a correspondence-based approach can. Because the computer-generated images have been rendered with such attention to 3D spatial information, they acquire a very powerful perceptual realism, despite the obvious ontological problems in calling them "realistic." These are falsified correspondences, yet because the perceptual information they contain is valid, the dinosaurs acquire a remarkable degree of photographic realism.

In a similar way, President Kennedy speaking in *Forrest Gump* is a falsified correspondence which is nevertheless built from internally valid perceptual information. Computer modelling of synthetic visual speech and facial animation relies on existing micro-analyses of human facial expression and phonetic mouth articulations. The digital-effects artist used these facial cues to animate Kennedy's image and sync his mouth movements with the scripted dialogue. At the perceptual level of phonemic articulation and facial register, the correspondences established are true and enable the viewer to accept the photographic and dramatic reality of the scene. But these correspondences also establish a falsified relationship with the historical and archival filmic records of reality. The resulting image is perceptually realistic but referentially unreal, a paradox that present film theory has a hard time accounting for.

The profound impact of digital imaging, in this respect, lies in the unprecedented ways that it permits film-makers to extend principles of perceptual realism to unreal images. The creative manipulation of photographic images is, of course, as old as the medium of photography. For example, flashing film prior to development or dodging and burning portions of the image during printing will produce lighting effects that did not exist in the scene that was photographed. The tension between perceptual realism and referential artifice clearly predates digital imaging. It has informed all fantasy and special-effects work where film-makers strive to create unreal images that nevertheless seem credible. What is new and revolutionary about digital imaging is that it increases to an extraordinary degree a film-maker's control over the informational cues that establish perceptual realism. Unreal images have never before seemed so real.

Digital imaging alters our sense of the necessary relationship involving *both* the camera and the profilmic event. The presence of either is no longer an absolute requirement for generating photographic images that correspond to spatio-temporally valid properties of the physical world. If neither a camera nor an existent referent is necessary for the digital rendition of photographic reality, the application of internally valid perceptual correspondences with the 3D world *is* necessary for establishing the credibility of the synthetic reality. These correspondences establish bridges between what can be seen and photographed and that which can be "photographed" but not seen.

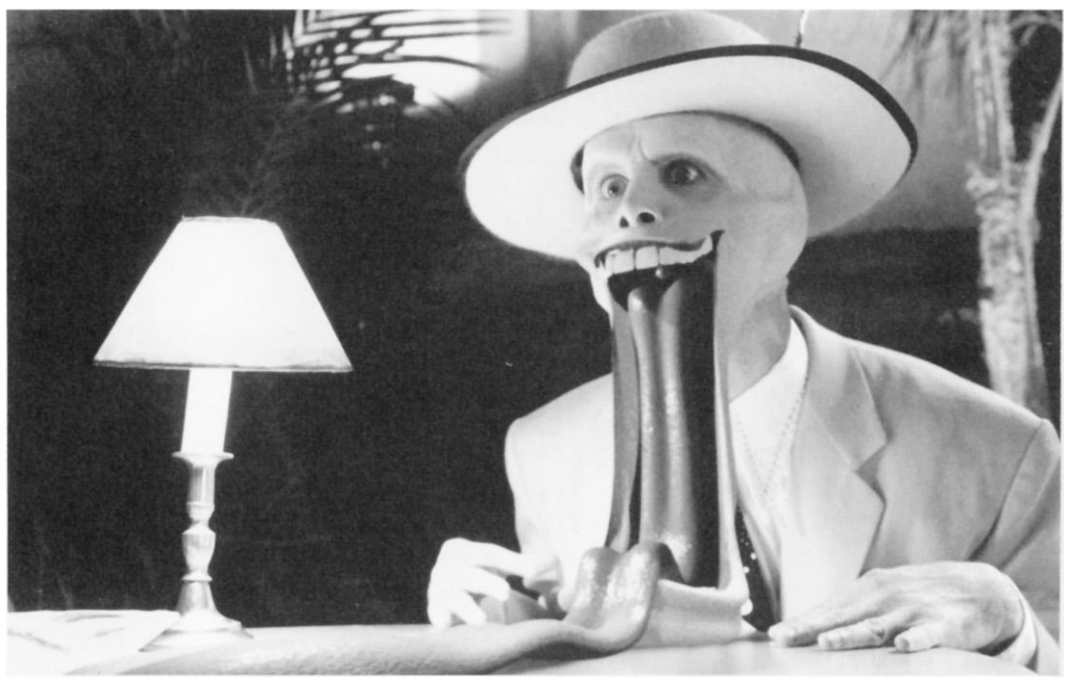
Because these correspondences between synthetic environments and real environments employ multiple cues, the induced realism of the final CG image can be extraordinarily convincing. The digital-effects artists interviewed for this essay resisted the idea that any one cue was more important than others and instead emphasized that their task was to build as much 3D information as possible into the CG image, given budgetary constraints, present computational limitations, and the stylistic demands of a given film. With respect to the latter, Kevin Mack pointed out that style coexists with the capability for making the CG images look as real as possible. The Swiss chateau composite in *True Lies* discussed earlier exemplifies this tension.

The apparent realism of digitally processed or created images, then, is a function of the way that multiple levels of perceptual correspondence are built into the image. These establish reference points with the

viewer's own experientially based understanding of light, space, motion, and the behavior of objects in a three-dimensional world. The resulting images may not contain photographable events, but neither do they represent purely illusory constructions. The reliability or nonreliability of the perceptual information they contain furnishes the viewer with an important framework for evaluating the logic of the screen worlds these images help establish.

The emphasis in contemporary film theory has undeniably shifted away from naive notions of indexical realism in favor of an attention to the constructedness of cinematic discourse. Yet indexicality remains an important point of origin even for perspectives that reincorporate it as a variant of illusionism, of the cinema's ability to produce a reality-effect. Bill Nichols notes that "Something of reality itself seems to pass through the lens and remain embedded in the photographic emulsion," while also recognizing that "Digital sampling techniques destroy this claim."[37] He concludes that the implications of this "are only beginning to be grasped,"[38] and therefore limits his recent study of the filmic representation of reality to non-digitized images.

Digital imaging exposes the enduring dichotomy in film theory as a false boundary. It is not as if cinema either indexically records the world or stylistically transfigures it. Cinema does both. Similarly, digital-imaging practices suggest that contemporary film theory's insistence upon the constructedness and artifice of cinema's discursive properties may be less productive than is commonly thought. The problem here is the implication of discursive equivalence, the idea that all cinematic representations are, in the end, equally artificial, since all are the constructions of form or ideology. But, as this essay has suggested, some of these representations, while being referentially unreal, are perceptually realistic. Viewers use and rely upon these perceptual correspondences when responding to, and evaluating, screen experience.



Computer imaging in *The Mask*

These areas of correspondence coexist in any given film with narrative, formal, and generic conventions, as well as intertextual determinants of meaning. Christopher Williams has recently observed that viewers make strong demands for reference from motion pictures, but in ways that simultaneously accomodate style and creativity: "We need films to be about life in one way or another, but we allow them lattitude in how they meet this need."[40] Thus, Williams maintains that any given film will feature "the active interplay between the elements which can be defined as realist, and the others which function simultaneously and have either a nonrealist character (primarily formal, linguistic or conventional) or one

which can be called anti-realist because the character of its formal, linguistic or conventional procedures specifically or explicitly tries to counteract the cognitive dimensions we have linked with realism."[41] Building 3D cues inside computer-generated images enables viewers to correlate those images with their own spatio-temporal experience, even when the digitally processed image fails in other ways to obey that experience (as when the Terminator morphs out of a tiled floor to seize his victim). Satisfying the viewer's demand for reference permits, in turn, patterned or stylish deviations from reference.

Stressing correspondence-based transformational abilities enables us to maintain a link, a relationship, between the materials that are to be digitally transformed (elements of the 3D world) and their changed state, as well as providing a means for preserving a basis for concepts of realism in a digitized cinema. Before we can subject digitally animated and processed images, like the velociraptors stalking the children through the kitchens of *Jurassic Park*, to extended meta-critiques of their discursive or ideological inflections (and these critiques are necessary), we first need to develop a precise understanding of how these images work in securing for the viewer a perceptually valid experience which may even invoke, as a kind of memory trace, now historically superseded assumptions about indexical referencing as the basis of the credibility that photographic images seem to possess.

In the correspondence-based approach to cinematic representation developed here, perceptual realism, the accurate replication of valid 3D cues, becomes not only the glue cementing digitally created and live-action environments, but also the foundation upon which the uniquely transformational functions of cinema exist. Perceptual realism furnishes the basis on which digital imaging may be carried out by effects artists and understood, evaluated, and interpreted by viewers. The digital replication of perceptual correspondence for the film viewer is an enormously complex undertaking and its ramifications clearly extend well beyond film theory and aesthetics to encompass ethical, legal, and social issues. Film theory will need to catch up to this rapidly evolving new category of imaging capabilities and grasp it in all of its complexity. To date, theory has tended to minimize the importance of perceptual correspondences, but the advent of digital imaging demonstrates how important they are and have been all along. Film theory needs now to pay closer attention to what viewers see on the screen, how they see it, and the relation of these processes to the larger issue of how viewers see. Doing this may mean that film theory itself will change, and this essay has suggested some ways in which that might occur. Digital imaging represents not only the new domain of cinema experiences, but a new threshold for theory as well.

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Thanks to Carl Plantinga and Mark J. P. Wolf for their helpful suggestions on an early version of this paper.

Notes

1. Telephone interview with the author, October 19, 1994.
2. Quoted in Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 123–24.
3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 5.
4. Ibid., p. 76.
5. Ibid., p. 87.
6. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 14.
7. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. ix.
8. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 16–23.
9. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), note 2, p. 268.
10. The design and creation of these ads are profiled in detail in Christopher W. Baker, *How Did They Do It? Computer Illusion in Film and TV* (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books, 1994).
11. See Ming C. Lin and Dinesh Manocha, "Interference Detection Between Curved Objects for Computer Animation," in *Models and Techniques in Computer Animation*, ed. Nadia Magnenat Thalmann and Daniel Thalmann (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993), pp. 43–57.
12. Ron Magid, "ILM's Digital Dinosaurs Tear Up Effects Jungle," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 74, no. 12 (December 1993), p. 56.
13. Stephen Pizello, "*True Lies* Tests Cinema's Limits," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 75, no. 9 (September 1994), p. 44.
14. Telephone interview with the author, October 25, 1994.
15. Telephone interview with the author, October 25, 1994.
16. Ron Magid, "ILM Breaks New Digital Ground for *Gump*," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 75, no. 10 (Oc-

tober 1994), p. 52.

17. I do not wish to imply that photography was ever a mere mechanical recording of the visual world. During shooting, printing, and developing, photographers found ways of creating their own special effects. Despite this, theorists have insisted upon the medium's fundamental indexicality.
18. Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).
19. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 287.
20. Colin McCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* p. 182.
21. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 25.
22. Telephone interview with the author, October 25, 1994.
23. Noël Carroll has urged film theory in this direction by recommending smaller scale, piece-meal theorizing about selected aspects of cinema rather than cinema in toto and on a grand scale. See *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory,* p. 255, and Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 230–34.
24. For a fuller discussion of this literature, see my essays "The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 47, no. 1 (Fall 1993), pp. 16–28 and "Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).
25. See Uta Frith and Jocelyn E. Robson, "Perceiving the Language of Films," *Perception*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 97–103; Renee Hobbs, Richard Frost, Arthur Davis, and John Stauffer, "How First-Time Viewers Comprehend Editing Conventions," *Journal of Communication* , no. 38 (1988), pp. 50–60; Julian Hochberg and Virginia Brooks, "Picture Perception as an Unlearned Ability: A Study of One Child's Performance," *American Journal of Psychology,* vol. 74, no. 4 (December 1962), pp. 624–28; Robert N. Kraft, "Rules and Strategies of Visual Narratives," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* no. 64 (1987), pp. 3–14; Robert N. Kraft, Phillip Cantor, and Charles Gottdiener, "The Coherence of Visual Narratives," *Communication Research,* vol. 18, no. 5 (October 1991), pp. 601–16; Robin Smith, Daniel R. Anderson, and Catherine Fischer, "Young Children's Comprehension of Montage," *Child Development* no. 56 (1985), pp. 962–71.
26. See Austin S. Babrow, Barbara J. O'Keefe, David L. Swanson, Renee A. Myers, and Mary A. Murphy, "Person Perception and Children's Impression of Television and Real Peers," *Communication Research,* vol. 15, no. 6 (December 1988), pp. 680–98; Thomas J. Berndt and Emily G. Berndt, "Children's Use of Motives and Intentionality in Person Perception and Moral Judgement," *Child Development* no. 46 (1975), pp. 904–12; Aimee Dorr, "How Children Make Sense of Television," in *Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication*, ed. Morris Janowitz and Paul M. Hirsch (New York: Free Press, 1981), pp. 363–85; Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor, "Developmental Differences in Response to a Television Character's Appearance and Behavior," *Developmental Psychology,* vol. 21, no. 6 (1985), pp. 1065–74; Paul Messaris and Larry Gross, "Interpretations of a Photographic Narrative by Viewers in Four Age Groups," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* no. 4 (1977), pp. 99-111.
27. Elizabeth M. Perse and Rebecca B. Rubin, "Attribution in Social and Parasocial Relationships," *Communication Research,* vol. 16, no. 1 (February 1989), pp. 59–77.
28. I am indebted to Carl Plantinga for clarification of some of these distinctions.
29. Telephone interviews with the author, October 25, 1994.
30. Stuart Feldman, "Rendering Techniques for Computer-Aided Design," *SMPTE Journal*, vol. 103, no. 1 (January 1994), pp. 7–12.
31. With respect to digital-imaging practices, rendering is distinct from the phases of model-building and animation and refers to the provision of texture, light, and color cues within a simulated environment.
32. Texture-mapping is a process whereby a flat surface is detailed with texture, such as skin wrinkles, and can then be wrapped around a three-dimensional model visualized in computer space. Some surfaces texture-map more easily than others. Pat Byrne, at Post Effects, points out that spherical objects are problematic because the top and bottom tend to look pinched. Telephone interview with the author, October 25, 1994.
33. Telephone interview with the author.
34. Author's interview with Kevin Mack. See also Tsuneya Kurihara, Ken-ichi Anjyo, and Daniel Thalmann, "Hair Animation with Collision Detection," in *Models and Techniques in Computer Animation,* pp. 128–38.
35. See Stephania Loizidou and Gordon J. Clapworthy, "Legged Locomotion Using HIDDS," in *Models and Techniques in Computer Animation*, pp. 257–69.
36. Ibid., p. 258.
37. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 5.
38. Ibid., p. 268.
39. Christopher Williams, "After the Classic, the Classical and Ideology: the Differences of Realism," *Screen,* vol. 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1994), p. 282.
40. Ibid., p. 289.

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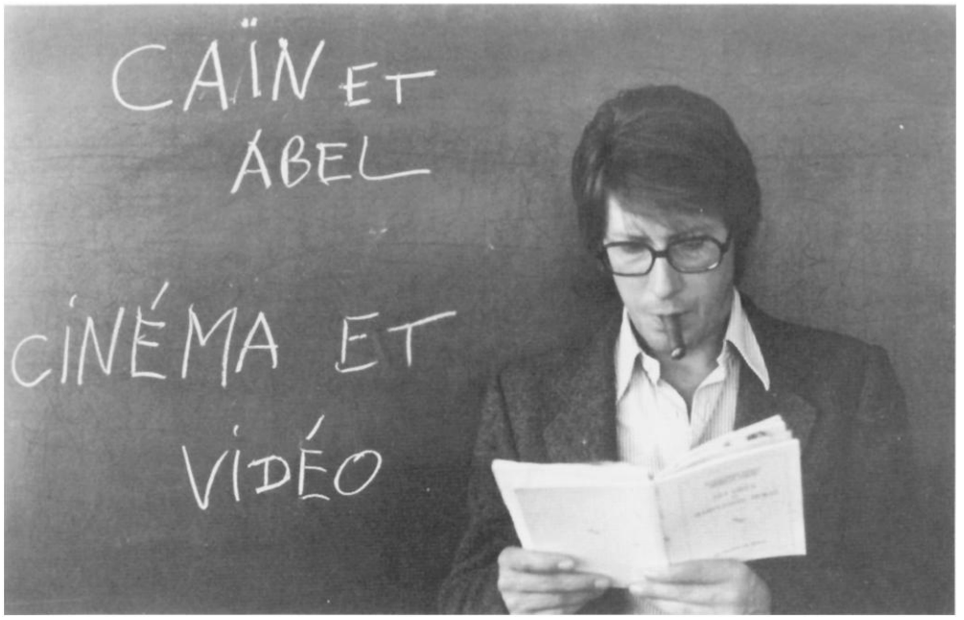
Film in the Age of Video

"Oh, We Don't Know Where We're Going

The camera is at floor level. The scene it's recording is set in a town meeting hall in the American West circa 1890. A man in modern dress stands screen left, head and shoulders cut off by the top of the frame, holding a slate reading "Sidney" (the film's director, George), "Folsey" (its cameraman, also George), and "1348, D-16 Loew's Inc. 1474, Scene 130A, Take 7." Behind this slate-holder is a group of actors in period dress, among them Judy Garland and Marjorie Main. As the slate-holder moves out of the frame, Garland and Main lift the hems of their skirts. The camera rises slightly and moves forward. Main leans back and smiles broadly, then almost immediately moves out of the shot. Other actors quickly begin to dance into the shot from left and right as music breaks out on a sound track that has up till now been silent. Garland begins a song whose refrain goes: "March on, little Doagies, march on down the trail." Still singing, she links arms with several of the other actors, who now include Ray Bolger and Chill Wills, and leads the way out of the meeting hall and onto an exterior set of a Western town at night. Still singing, she continues to lead the group—now a throng of 50 or so—through backgrounds of rocks and cacti. They finally arrive at a clearing where a bonfire has been built, and Garland mounts a platform before the blaze to belt out the final chorus: "Out there lies the prairie, /Out there breaks the day, /Oh we don't know where we're going /but we're on our way."

The scene described above is the "March of the Doagies" number from the 1946 MGM musical *The Harvey Girls*. If you don't remember it, there's a simple reason why. It was cut from the film just prior to release. According to author Hugh Fordin in his book *The World of Entertainment!*,[1] after *The Harvey Girls* was previewed in Inglewood, Calif., "March of the Doagies"—and another Harry Warren/Johnny Mercer number, "My Intuition"—was excised simply because it "did not play too well." But looking at the number today it's hard to imagine what anyone found wrong with it. It's a sequence that could have easily been the highlight of a dozen lesser musicals, but *The Harvey Girls*, equipped as it was with the all-time showstopper "On the Atchison Topeka and the Santa Fe," simply didn't need it.

"March of the Doagies" was first shown to the public in 1994 in *That's Entertainment III*, the MGM compilation film highlighted by numbers cut from such classics as *Singin' in the Rain, The Bandwagon, Cabin in the Sky*, and *The Belle of New York*. Unlike its predecessors, *That's Entertainment III* played in only a handful of (extremely brief) theatrical engagements before heading for home video. A few years ago that might have seemed an unjust fate. But today the once distinct spheres of theatrical and home exhibition have been radically conflated. Now that only a few months separate the theatrical and home video release of most new films, theaters have rapidly taken a back



Jean-Luc Godard's
Sauve qui peut la vie

But We're On Our Way"

seat to home video. *That's Entertainment III*, seen from the start as a video product, is less a spectacle designed to be enjoyed in a darkened theater than a work of historical and cultural research that invites detailed analysis—a mode of consumption that home video, by its very nature, encourages. And for an increasing number of consumers—even those without degrees in film—this analytical approach has become part of the way they watch movies today.

The above description of "March of the Doagies" isn't derived from *That's Entertainment III*, where it's shown in excerpted form, but rather from a laser videodisc set—*Judy Garland: The Golden Years at MGM*. A lavishly produced five-disc album, *The Golden Years* features *The Harvey Girls, The Pirate,* and *Summer Stock* in their entirety, plus a wide variety of additional items: outtakes from other Garland films; rarely seen short subjects; Garland's first film

The Harvey Girls:
"March of the Doagies"

appearance—at age seven—belting out "That's the Good Old Sunny South" with the Gumm Sisters in *The Big Revue of 1929*; and selected musical highlights. Even if you're not all that wild about Judy, it's hard not to be impressed with a set like this. And "March of the Doagies" shows why. For *The Golden Years* allows you to second-guess the powers-that-were at MGM in 1946, and recut *The Harvey Girls* yourself by inserting the number back into the film's continuity with the push of a button and the flick of a switch. *The Golden Years* is a remarkable set, but as even a casual glance at a well-stocked video store will show, it's scarcely alone on the laser video shelf. There are any number of sets devoted to films old and new that enable the average, everyday consumer to examine the cinema as never before.

"As long as the study of cinema depends on the substance and systems of motion picture film, we are dependent upon the physicality and idiosyncracies as well as the wonder of what is basically a nineteenth-century technology," wrote critic Anthony Revaux in the Fall 1973 issue of this publication.[2] "The more we wish to screen the work and the more intensive our level of analysis, the more difficulties we presently face." Revaux saw home video, which was just coming into being in the early 1970s, as the way out of this impasse. Reporting on then-competing VHS, Betamax, and laser formats, he sounded a stirringly optimistic, brave-new-world note: "We are now on the brink of a totally new base of visual technology which has the potential of . . . changing, hopefully raising, our collective consciousness of cinema and our personal and public relationship to moving image art."

As *The Golden Years* shows, Revaux was absolutely right about the fact that home video would alter our relationship to the cinema. But for many, the jury is still out on whether this change has been for good or ill. Since his article appeared, the Beta format has been obliterated by VHS and the marketing muscle the Sony corporation was able to put behind it (despite Beta's visual superiority). Due to its lack of recording capability, the even more visually sophisticated laser format has served only a minority of consumers. But laser too is imperiled, by the new DVD (Digital Video Disc), a sleek CD-sized format just this year coming onto the market with an enormous publicity campaign behind it.

The makers of DVD have claimed that it is both visually and aurally superior to laser; it can also contain an entire film of two hours or more on a single side. But whether consumers are willing to shell out for yet another video dissemination device remains to be seen. If the effort that went into VHS's triumph is applied to DVD, and it lives up to its hype, it could mean laser's end. But what won't end is the ever-growing debate that has split the film community into pro- and anti-home video factions.

Recently the *Los Angeles Times*[3] reported comments made during a debate on the Internet between video supporters and film "purists" about the two mediums. According to Gene Stavis, a professor of film at the School of Visual Arts in New York, the opening scene of *Vertigo*, in which James Stewart is seen chasing across the rooftops of San Francisco, "just doesn't work" on home video, as it destroys the illusion of depth the film possessed on the giant theater screen. "There are clear failings in video, no one is denying that," countered Mike Frank, an associate professor of film at Bentley College in Waltham, Mass., "but as far as I can tell, what matters to most people can be gotten from a reasonable video copy."

Frank's point about "what matters most" is well taken. Hollywood classics like *Sullivan's Travels, The Philadelphia Story*, and *All About Eve* don't suffer any loss of visual impact or narrative meaning when transferred to video. In fact, certain films are actually *improved* on home video because of the reduced size of the image. While theater audiences had a hard time appreciating the cleverness of the minimal cutting and mobile camerawork in Hitchcock's *Rope*, video viewers can easily see what the director was up to. Coppola's *One from the Heart* likewise looks better on the home front, its studio-made Las Vegas charmingly reduced to a living dollhouse on video.

Ultimately, however, Stavis is absolutely right. Most videos lack film's visual depth—though there are exceptions when it comes to laser video. But more important, there's an enormous difference between a self-contained image seen in a living room and a gigantic image floating across a theater screen. Even the sharpest, letterboxed laser version of *Lawrence of Arabia* can't compete with a pristine print projected on a giant screen. In fact, with some films, not only is video out of the question, but 35mm as well. As anyone who has seen the 70mm version of *Playtime* knows, more than half of its impact is lost in 35mm. Likewise, those lucky enough to have experienced *2001: A Space Odyssey* in Cinerama know that mere 70mm versions of the film just don't cut it. Still, the

One from the Heart: better on the home screen?

heart of the film vs. video debate doesn't lie with such obvious exceptions, but with films that are more the audiovisual rule. And in some cases distinctions often rest on subtle points.

Albert Lewin's bizarre romantic fantasy *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, for example, would appear at first glance to suffer little from video transfer. But on closer examination it's clear that several pivotal close-ups of its star, Ava Gardner—lushly photographed in Technicolor by the great Jack Cardiff—don't register as effectively on home video. A memorable scene in Jean Eustache's *Mes petites amoureses* evokes the convulsive beauty of these enormous shots of Ava—as viewed by Eustache's adolescent hero from the balcony of his local cinema. On video they're just like any other close-up. The same can be said of the close-ups used by Hitchcock to highlight objects in his films—such as the key in *Notorious*. Overwhelming in the theater, it's just a minor detail at home. Nevertheless, for the vast majority of home viewers such arguments are academic. Comfort and convenience is the name of the game.

About a year and a half ago I went to see *Casablanca* at a special revival screening at Mann's Chinese theater in Hollywood. While it was nice to see it projected on a big screen, most of its dramatic effects were the same as they were on the laser videodisc I'd just purchased. In fact, in some respects my laser *Casablanca* was superior. Laser lights the frame with an evenness and an intensity only the best-working arc lamp can provide. Moreover, the laser *Casablanca* is always in focus. But in one curiously crucial way, *Casablanca* at the Chinese was decidedly different, and superior, to *Casablanca* at home—sound.

When Humphrey Bogart shot down Conrad Veidt in the film's finale, the sound of gunfire reverberated like a sudden explosion of TNT. No, this wasn't a newly remixed print of the Warner Bros. classic, nor was the Chinese specially equipped to make a 1942 film sound as if it were made last week. The simple fact of the matter was that the film's sound was calibrated to take into account the effect it would have when echoed inside a large theater. There are precious few movie palaces like the Chinese still around today. While most of the multiplexes that have replaced them have theaters as small as the average living room, it's not uncommon for them to boast of a theater or two of fairly ample size as well. None, however, are of movie palace dimensions. And it's for this reason that these theaters require Dolby stereo: an "advance" made to compensate for the shrunken stature of the movie-going experience.

To remember the movie palaces, with enormous images floating in a velvety sea of darkness, framed by curtains that never seemed to close on an ever-shifting program (feature, cartoons, shorts, news, coming attractions, etc.) is not to indulge in nostalgia but rather to note how radically cinematic object relations have changed. There's nothing in any way distinctive about the modern theatrical movie-going

experience, save for sound. And even that can be reproduced more subtly at home with stereo devices.

"Cinema has become hyper-realist, technically sophisticated, effective," notes postmodern seer Jean Baudrillard regretfully. "[It's] as if the cinema were basically regressing towards infinity, towards some indefinable perfection, a formal, empty perfection . . . there are [a few] great films [like] Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, where one can still find a mythical dimension but in a muted kind of way, and it's my impression that they no longer have a *direct* impact in terms of the power of imagination."[4]

Baudrillard is right. We have entered an era of lowered cinematic expectations. For in spite of exceptions to the rule like Leos Carax (*Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*) there will be no further Leans, Kubricks, Tatis, or even DeMilles in the cinema's future. Still, things aren't all that bleak, what with the analytical route taken by Godard in *Nouvelle Vague*, Scorsese in *Casino*, and Haynes in *Safe*. Moreover, there's a lot of cinema still to be explored through video—some instances of which split the spectacle/analysis divide. Consider, for example, "Mr. Monotony," another excised Judy Garland number—this time from *Easter Parade*—which debuted in abbreviated form in *That's Entertainment III*, and can be seen complete in the "Special Collector's Edition" of the laser disc of that film.

Utilizing a novelty jazz ditty by Irving Berlin about a trombone player who leaves his wife for a pretty clarinetist, the number couldn't be simpler. Judy Garland comes out and stands in from of a curtain wearing the top half of a tuxedo with a white scarf round her neck, high heels, black stockings, and a small black hat perched jauntily over one eye. Swaying back and forth slightly, she struts before the curtain, playing to an unseen audience, delivering the song with the sort of hand gestures (moving them side to side, putting them in her pocket, sweeping one across her face, holding an arm aloft) that in her later years would be familiar from her concert appearances. Though the number seems at first glance to be done in one continuous take, it consists in fact of eight separate shots—including an enormous close-up to which I'll return in a moment.

Unlike "March of the Doagies," it's easy to see why "Mr. Monotony" was axed from *Easter Parade*. Entertaining as the number is, Garland's costume is far too contemporary for the film's period setting. Seeing it in the context of her career, however, it's of pivotal importance, for it looks forward to that stage career, and is a kind of preliminary farewell to the movies. The number was staged by *Easter Parade*'s director Charles Walters—a former dancer who graduated to choreographer and then film director—whose importance to Garland's career has been sadly overshadowed by her far more publicized partnership with Vincente Minnelli. Walters staged many of Garland's musical turns, but most important of all, he directed and choreographed *Summer Stock*, Garland's last film for MGM, whose climactic number, "Get Happy," finds her wearing the "Mr. Monotony" costume.

Perhaps the best way to regard "Mr. Monotony" is not as an excised part of *Easter Parade*, but as a film unto itself. In "Mr. Monotony," Garland, a theatrical performer whose image is inextricably linked to the history of the film musical, is shown at her most professional—and most disturbing. Young and old, naive and sophisticated, male and female, she is the conflation of cultural contradictions. And what clinches this iconographic ambiguity is a sudden, shockingly enormous close-up—hat over one eye, lips an enormous red slash—as she sings the line "Have you got any monotony today?" No conflict between film and video in this shot. No problem of divining its impact on the small screen vs. the large. It overwhelms no matter where you see it.

"The cinema," Jacques Rivette reminds us, "is necessarily fascination and rape, that is how it acts on people; it is something pretty unclear, something one sees shrouded in darkness."[5] And as "Mr. Monotony" suggests, that ability isn't necessarily diminished when the images it produces are haloed by one's living-room lights.

■ David Ehrenstein is the Los Angeles editor of *Film Quarterly*.

Notes

1. Hugh Fordin, *The World of Entertainment: Hollywood's Greatest Musicals; The Freed Unit at MGM* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).
2. Anthony Reveaux, "New Techniques for the Demystification of the Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 5 (Fall 1973).
3. Ted Johnson, "Small Screen for Movies Is a Big Issue for Some Viewers," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1996.
4. Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard Live*, selected interviews, ed. Mike Gane (New York: Routledge, 1993).
5. "Time Overflowing," An interview with Jacques Rivette, *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 204, 1968.

Reviews

Casino

Director: Martin Scorsese. Producer: Barbara De Fina. Screenwriter: Nicholas Pileggi and Scorsese. Cinematographer: Robert Richardson. Production designer: Dante Ferretti. Editor: Thelma Schoonmaker. Universal Pictures.

Just as Warren Beatty's *Bugsy* said more about Hollywood than Las Vegas, so the recent spate of Vegas-bashing films reveal Hollywood's need to displace its self-loathing. British director Mike Figgis's *Leaving Las Vegas* exploited dead end-assumptions as a substitute for plotline, while Dutch director Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls* managed to be both lurid and plastic. Of course, Americans wrote both these scripts, but the most interesting things about Las Vegas managed to escape them for the same reason they escaped Nicholas Pileggi, whose script for *Casino* was based on his own book, *Casino: Love and Honor in Las Vegas*. Las Vegas has a life of its own. It's not that different from most single-industry cities in America. Detroit, D.C., L.A., and L.V., to name but a few, are obsessed with themselves and able to become the obsession of others.

Robert DeNiro as Ace

Joe Pesci as Nicky

Sharon Stone as Ginger

The happy couple

Martin Scorsese's *Casino* is a vile twist on "Nostalgia ain't what it used to be." Formally structured as a memoir of the rise and fall of bookie Sam "Ace" Rothstein (Robert DeNiro), the movie looks back to an artless if not innocent world. In the city's golden era, blood and money flowed like water through the Nevada desert; hot-blooded gangsters ran casinos; and racketeering was the blood sport of kings. Once, guys like Anthony "Tony the Ant" Spilotro, reconstructed here as Nicky Santoro (Joe Pesci), could shake down Vegas like a monkey in a coconut tree and put a bullet through a recalcitrant mug before you could say "blackjack." The film tries to shock us with an inferno of mogul mania, mobster mayhem, and meretricious modernity. The narration sentimentalizes the past as we hear the cynical voice-over of Ace Rothstein, who's an amalgam of San Diego bookie/retired casino boss Allen Glick and an actual undesirable of the casino crowd, Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal (both of whom chatted at length with Pileggi for his book). The movie's shell game is this: Ace is sent to manage a mob property; his old buddy Nicky shows up as an enthusiastic enforcer; Ace marries a Vegas hooker, and the three of them form a wobbly triangle. Along the way we discover the strange world of gaming casinos, which is presented as too bizarre for any meaningful connection to be made between the cheap melodrama of Vegas and the minimalist degeneracy of state-run lotteries.

DeNiro (who never really leaves the actor behind to arrive at the character of Ace), has been a notorious bookie and now takes his job of running the Tangiers—a casino on The Strip loosely modeled on

the Sands—too seriously. He's proud of his club and only a hair's breadth from corporate. The first half hour of the film is devoted to the mechanics of a casino: the counting room, the chutes rattling with coins, the savvy placement of tables and machines, the various types of gamblers, and the hierarchy from dealer through pit boss to the "eye in the sky" that watches everything. The clever braiding of information and zero-degree drama in this introduction leads us to accept Ace in a positive role as hands-on C.E.O.

Woven through the tapestry of this enterprise is a thumbnail sketch of Ginger (Sharon Stone). Stone's flawless physique makes her a vertiginously high-class hooker, a perfection of plasticity she effectively undercuts with the edgy insecurity of the gambler who knows there's nothing left to lose but self-respect. She and Ace "meet cute" as he watches her confront a gambling mate, demand her cut of the winnings, then toss chips into the air like confetti. This does not get her thrown out of the club, as it would anyone else, because Ace is smitten. As a slo-mo bottle-blonde in sequins and fuck-me heels, she is the ideal Vegas trophy. But a wife? In the love-at-first-sight phase, Ginger's accomplishment seems to be knowing how to grease the palms of bell captains, parking lot attendants, etc., which shows that "she knew how to take care of people." But Ginger's not a nurse; she's a prostitute. As a bad wife and mother in the third act, her harlotry spices up nasty marital rows. (Ginger's idea of parenting is to tie her daughter to the bed while she goes bar-hopping with Nicky.) Has Ace forgotten what he knew about Ginger before he married her?

Angry at her bad habits, Ace welches on the deal he cut with her—a pioneering prenuptial that promised Ginger a horde of jewelry. The plot goes overboard, however, when Ace adds a boy scout's pledge to take care of Ginger financially for the rest of her life, no matter what happens. We have no reason to believe either of these hustlers could hear that without a guffaw. What's more, Ace is dumb enough to give her the only key to a safe deposit box with some $2 million in it—ransom money, in case he's kidnapped or something. You don't need a keno card to tell you Ginger will wind up treating him like any other john. Besides, it's Scorsesan doctrine: women cannot be booked.

The plot would be as short as a Vegas winning streak were it not for Ace's pal Nicky, a sadistic goon who's intent on becoming boss. Seventies-Vegas, Nicky wistfully reminisces, "was the last time street guys like us were given anything that valuable." But Nicky doesn't enjoy rolling in money nearly as much as bathing in blood. He will crash and burn, but not before screwing Ginger and his own best buddy. Ace will be redeemed by his paternal love for his daughter Amy at the end of a narration that takes us from an opening scene of him being blown up in his car to a closing where he miraculously escapes from that same conflagration.

I object to this mess—as a film critic and as a Nevada native with family ties to neon. I grew up in the 1960s watching the gaming business, an industry so lucrative that Nevada has no state income taxes. *Godfather II* is much better than *Casino* at explaining how an East Coast mob eyed the Nevada terrain and fled from the Feds. That the guys upon whom this story is based had to report and carry profits to a Kansas deli says more about them than about the neon desert.

The Nevada State Gaming Commission is a powerful body unafraid to wield its authority, which is not to say it's not corrupt. Power corrupts, but the loss of power corrupts even more, which is part of the unacknowledged background of *Casino*. The film is no more typical as a business history of gambling than *The Great Train Robbery* is of the banking industry's shipping of legal tender. The State Gaming Commission may exercise benevolent neglect at times; it may be as much on the take as any corrupt corporation you may care to name, but it's not a round-up of dumb cowpokes, which these East Coast cineastes (gambling with other people's money in the movie biz) would have you believe. "Every guy in cowboy boots," whines Ace, "is either a County Commissioner or related to one."

One scene that does strike an honest chord has a commissioner warning Ace that this territory does not belong to Ace's kind; the Nevadans own and run it—this because Ace won't hire back an incompetent nephew of a local politician. On the heels of Ace's sudden escalation of standards comes an official inquiry into his lack of a gaming license. Ace was initially worried about passing the scrutiny of the Gaming Commission, but his pals tell him not to worry: the commission can be so slow as never to get to his application. But now things speed up, and Ace's license is denied. So is the bad guy the bookie or the regulators? The truth is that the Gaming Commission prefers to play by its own rules, even when it gets frog-walked into playing dice with wiseguys. Some casino owners are more difficult than others; perhaps that's why the Gaming Commission cottoned on to the cor-

porations that Scorsese finds so much less admirable than bozos beating each other into pulp with baseball bats. At least corporate lawyers can cut a deal everybody can live with, the operative word being *live*.

Scorsese has got the decade wrong (the age he describes was more 1950s/1960s); the ethos wrong (the conflict between local yokels and the crumbs in the casinos is far more complex); and his cardinal rule of casinos dead wrong. Contrary to Ace's claim, savvy casino owners are not intent on taking back all the money. The maxim of the industry is the title of casino-pioneer Harold Smith's autobiography: *You Gotta Send Out Winners to Get Players*. Sufficient bucks flow in to let 10 percent flow back out (some will debate that figure as only 3 percent; there are sufficient casinos to allow such a range, but no house wants a reputation of nobody ever winning).

The gaming industry may incite the prurient instincts of people who think like gangsters, and they may not want to see it as a massively regulated business with a healthy profit margin even when run legally. When filtered through Scorsese's lens, it's the law, not the mobster, who's the bad guy. Yet underlying this film is a puritanical distrust of gaming and disdain of the nouveau riche types that it breeds. Scorsese wants to show how a reasonably disciplined casino boss like Ace (who is a Jew beset by an unspoken anti-Semitism that Scorsese won't address) can be brought down. But this character would have screwed up dealing second-hand cars because he's stuck in the mistake of constructing an ideal of middle-class life with a material girl and a maniac best friend. His fatal flaw lies not in his discipline but in the one area where he briefly abandons it.

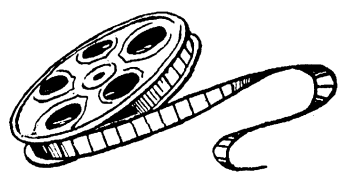
To be sure, few movies are made about honest men, and during the long hour of the second act, I credited Scorsese with finding the paradox in a Vegas casino making an honest man out of a bookie like Ace. He says things like, "Here I was celebrated as a solid citizen for things that'd get me thrown in jail back home." What Scorsese and production designer Dante Ferretti do get right is the ambience of the sprawling, air-conditioned, pool-studded, wall-to-wall carpeted luxury available to the haves in Las Vegas. And the Tangiers puts up a good show as a casino. The sound track is awash with the sassy brass of lounge bands fused with the jangle of the slots, the clink of bourbon and ice, the call of dealers, and delirious shrieks of odds-beaters. The music track is cleverly compiled out of the funk and jive of anxious entertainers droning songs about luck—not the Sahara's Showroom headliners like Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra. This dayless, nightless eternity of the hopeful gambler is so well documented that, in conjunction with the lessons on casino operations, it could play on PBS.

There remain, however, the long sequences of pointless violence that have been turning Scorsese's films into genre pieces with pretensions. To get back to the mean streets, Scorsese detours through the air-conditioned antechambers of vice in Vegas. As he has moved up in the world, so have his dramatis personae, and he has them spouting the clichés of wealth as only the wealthy can: "It can't buy me love." On this principle he ricochets through an illogical plot, exclaiming over the overt skimming in a casino as if he'd never known that comparable evil exists at the local Bijou, where cinema owners work their nut like a sponge and have only fairly recently been forced to the accountability of computerized ticketing.

The sensationalism built into Ginger's disintegration or Nicky's demanding blow-jobs are threadbare thrills to compensate for weak plot. Actually, Scorsese's inaccuracies about the gaming industry are just a byproduct of his need to reinvent the slasher movie for the art audience. *Casino* has gangsters who start as old men munching salami in the back of a deli and end up blasting or blasted full of holes. It revels in a Scorsese staple—a gangland mentality disguised as masculine virtue among men with a vision so narrow they cannot contemplate anything larger than being together. That's the outer limits of social organization in their world, glued together by dimwitted loyalty. It recalls *Means Streets* just before the characters start dying, when the boys in the bar laugh at each other over the line "Balls, said the queen, if I had them I'd be king." Such is the wannabe tragedy in *Casino*. Ace and Nicky and Ginger—they're good as long as they pull together, but once separated, they gotta die. In Scorsese's world, nobody gets to be king.

KAREN JAEHNE

■ Karen Jaehne has recently finished her first novel, *Unpopular Positions*.



The Madness of King George

Director: Nicholas Hytner. Producers: Stephen Evans and David Parfitt. Screenplay: Alan Bennett, from an original stage play. Cinematographer: Andrew Dunn. Music: George Fenton. Samuel Goldwyn .

Huge, double antechamber doors bar our admittance. At a polite knuckle-rapping they open and, though the Royals are fully clothed, the dressers fall hushed, turning in shock at our intrusion. Greville, George III's new equerry, is revealed as the intruder, and we slip almost unnoticed into the Royal presence. But the odd reaction to our entrance into this curiously public/private zone suggests we have, in fact, crossed into another world.

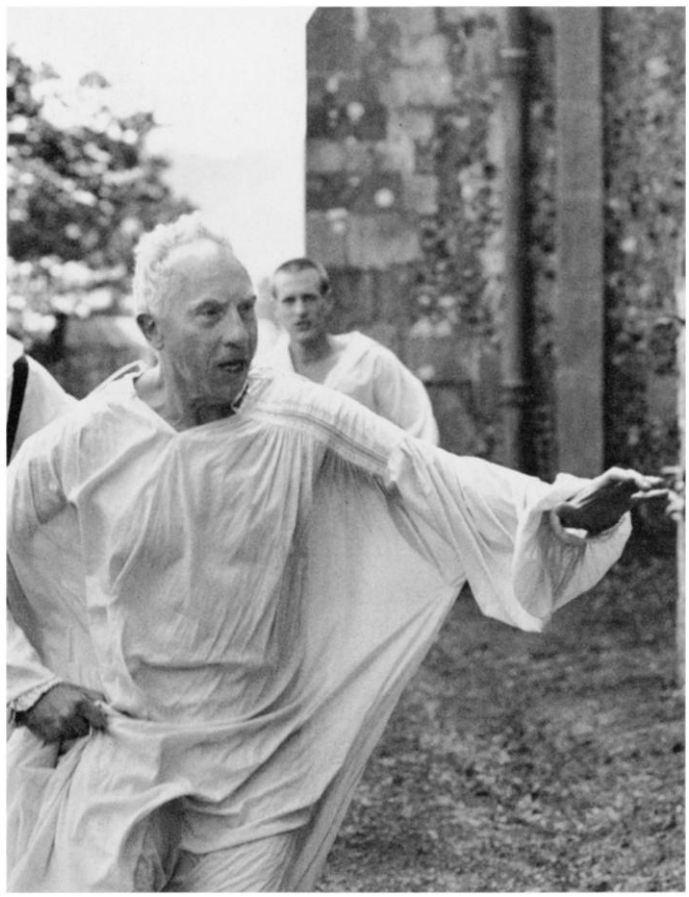
A case history of a royal bout with a rare, chronic illness, *The Madness of King George* is undersized for a typical Brithistorical quality drama. Nicholas Hytner's brisk, attuned direction, the lush sets and costuming, and Nigel Hawthorne's superb performance can't quite conceal the film's loftier dreams. For Alan Bennett's screenplay (based on his play) might pass for a condensation of the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

A member of the fabled British stage group Beyond the Fringe, Bennett's work for the stage, TV, and screen (*Habeas Corpus, Single Spies, Talking Heads*, and *A Private Function* among them) has already hinted at this kind of ambition. One comes away from this film with an exhilarated feeling not unlike what George III must feel at film's end: that one has been swung crazily around, had all one's frames of reference wildly shifted and then returned—but not quite to the same place. And this is where Foucault comes in.

It is Foucault's suggestion that the logical framework of an era is transparent (hence nearly invisible) to those in it, that such frameworks are neither fixed nor assimilable, and to glimpse this one must look to periods of dramatic change in worldview, like those that occurred some 200 years ago. Which, quite conveniently, is exactly the period of Bennett's film. Much of Foucault's work, most relevantly *Madness & Civilization, The Order of Things, The Birth of the Clinic,* and *Discipline & Punish*, details an abrupt conceptual shift across a broad social and intellectual front at the end of 18th century which produced a new alignment—both of ideas and institutions—that changed not only what one thought about, but *how* one thought. Hardly unique, such epistemological ruptures, or paradigm changes, so reconfigure cognitive geography they create disjunctions. Eras, particularly in the history of ideas, are discontinuous. This last shift in a brief period of time permitted the discovery of the human sciences—biology, linguistics, and economics—by revealing their subject: Man. Deposing God, King, and the Chain of Being as a model of the world, this new world view also necessarily reformed the social institutions of control, giving birth to the modern prison, school, hospital, and work place.

But while America and France were having the kind of social upheavals one might expect at such a time, what were the British up to? Bennett's answer is *The Madness of King George*. What we see as we enter the king's dressing rooms at Westminster with Greville in the year 1788 is George and family preparing for the opening of Parliament. The portrait Bennett and Hytner paint at the outset is of an irascible, energetic, and mercurial monarch whose abundant animal

vitality has blessed him with 15 royal offspring by his German wife, Charlotte (Helen Mirren), and a greater love for pig farming than for affairs of state. But even here—fit, active, moving smartly along the back halls of Westminster, adjuring his dissolute son George, Prince of Wales, to be productive, and to marry—the monarch is subject to lapses. Addressing Parliament, he only belatedly inserts the word "former" in reference to the American colonies. This provokes Charles Fox, wily head of the "reformer" Whigs, to remark to George's prime minister, William Pitt the Younger, that the king has not written his own speech. Pitt replies, "The king will do as he's told." As George is about to board his carriage, his equerry reminds him of the throng of writ-bearing subjects who routinely wait outside. "Oh . . . yes, right," George says, absentmindedly stepping to receive petitions he will never read or pass judgment on.



Though he occasionally has to be reminded that his actual office is to keep up appearances, sunny George seems blithely unaware that his royal powers may have eroded. There is, however, little evidence of more than the usual royal eccentricity until one night, while climbing into bed with his queen, the king attempts a fart, and failing of it, is seized by intense intestinal pain. Learning of his father's indisposition, the prince (played with a wonderfully festering languor by Rupert Everett) approaches Fox, who rapidly warms to the prince's suggestion that should the prince be installed as regent he, Fox, should become prime minister.

It is against these variously arrayed self-interested factions—Pitt, Fox, the prince, even his own lord chancellor—that the story of George's mysterious malady plays out. Though the king quickly recovers, what follows is a round of pre-dawn frenzies and randy assaults on the queen's sister, Lady Pembroke (Amanda Donohoe), that concludes in a nightmarish race up to the roof of Windsor Castle. Escaping imaginary floodwaters, King George desperately carries his youngest child to higher ground, with the queen in pursuit, calling fearfully after them. But the danger, as we see it, is foreshortened. Hytner shoots the delirious, spiraling climb up the narrow circular stairs from above; from our view, the deluded king is merely running in circles. It's a clever visual rhyme for the singularly personal revolution that has begun, and also for the Foucauldian idea that—given the utter discontinuity between epochs—progressive, linear time is an illusion. (At several points characters practically ejaculate, "There is no time!")

Despairing of his own sanity, George allows himself to be locked up and subjected to the authority of Baker, his physician, and Warren, physician to the Prince of Wales. Baffled by the king's infirmity, the two men enter a dim Royal College operating theatre to recruit yet a third doctor—the expert, Pepys. As they watch a grisly amputation, a Goyaesque scene of a whimpering patient being restrained by medical students in the dank pit below, Pepys cheerily explains that in the anfractuosities of the mind he finds "the stool most eloquent." What they will all ignore in the course of their investigations is the king's most vivid symptom, blue urine (though we'll learn in an epilogue it's a sign of porphyria, the disease he most likely suffered from). Shown the discolored urine, Pepys rolls his eyes away contemptuously and with a supercilious smile delivers a howler: "Medicine, sir, is a science of precise observation."

But the laugh here is set on a double-edge of

anachronism. "For thousands of years, after all, doctors had tested patients' urine," Foucault observes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, his archaeology of medical perception.[1] But in undergoing an epistemological revolution at the end of the 18th century, the sign "... no longer speaks the natural language of disease; it assumes shape and value only within the questions posed by medical investigation."[2] It's a temporary lapse, an oddity of the moment (an anachronism), that the king's urine is ignored. Indeed, it is Pepys's very modernity, his devotion to the system of an evolving "science" institutionalized in the authority of the Royal College, that makes him so airily dismissive of this antiquated sign. Urine, whose coloration could simply be read off a table, with its various shades corresponding to various distempers, is now no longer thought to have a *direct correspondence*, to be "eloquent" in expressing what is coming to be seen as an *underlying* disease process.

With the king showing no improvement and Fox and the Prince of Wales promoting a bill to install the prince as regent, Queen Charlotte and Lady Pembroke enlist Greville to call on one dour, humorless, and rather sadistic Dr. Willis, a man renowned for success with mental infirmities. Willis's favored treatment is the consistent application of restraint. At the least sign of rebellion, Willis (played with macabre intensity by Ian Holm) has George seized and set into a chair where he is bound hand and foot and gagged with leather straps. It is, not uncoincidentally, identical with a procedure found in the historical writings of Dr. Thomas Willis that forms a central part of Foucault's *Madness & Civilization*.

> "The insane person, placed in a special house, will be treated, either by the doctor or by trained assistants, in such a way that he may be always maintained in his duty, in his appearance and habits, by warnings, by remonstrances, and by punishments immediately inflicted."[3]

The climactic center of the film occurs as George is forcibly strapped into the chair. Emphatically inscribed, the camera rises to ceiling height, accompanied by Handel's coronation music from *Zadok the Priest*, and slowly rotates counterclockwise, looking down on this harrowing scene. As George bellows, "I am the king of England, Doctor!" Willis growls with smug impunity, "You . . . are *the patient*!!" It's a coronation in reverse. For George has become something even better than king: that newest of new things, the ever-improvable modern subjectivity—Man. This shift having made possible a view to the general underlying the specific (the man within the king), George, the man, now stands in for all of us. Terrified, gazing helplessly up at the ceiling, he mirrors our new-found reflexivity, to be poked, prodded, and relentlessly examined as the measure of all things. But from where did this new mutation in our seeing come?

A moment before, George, led forward and shown the chair, had murmured mournfully that while the implements of torture are shown to a felon to force a confession, they are shown to the king to secure his "silence"—a typically Foucauldian inversion. Precisely because of the king's special station, the technologies of torture—solely a sovereign's prerogative—are martialed, in his unique instance, to produce the opposite effect. But here Bennett turns mere philosophy into an other-worldly poetry, into that rarest of things, true soliloquy. By these logical rules it is the king alone who understands the truth of what he is saying. It is the blazing, brief insight of a man utterly isolated, a king who is mad, but mad north by northwest. In this signature scene, Bennett conflates torture with medical procedure, *Discipline & Punish* with *The Birth of the Clinic*, a conflation Foucault's work seems to invite:

> Something of the joust survived, between the judge who ordered the judicial torture and the suspect who was tortured; the "patient"—this is the term used to designate the victim—was subjected to a series of trials, graduated in severity, in which he succeeded if he "held out," or failed if he confessed. (The first degree of torture was the sight of the implements. In the case of children or of persons over the age of seventy one did not go beyond this stage.) . . . In the practice of torture, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together, they worked together on the patient's body. . . . In torture employed to extract a confession, there was an element of the investigation; there was also an element of the duel.[4]

What follows between Willis and George is as much a duel between doctor and patient as a medical investigation. Made to fear his stern captor, George eventually comes to obey Willis's merest glance. Even the Prince of Wales is shocked when Lady Pembroke repeats the whispered rumor that Willis's thera-

peutic successes are accomplished not so much by physical restraint as by means of his eyes: "You mean he looks at the king? Damned impudence."

Ian Holm's ferocious gaze, his snarling cry to the king's contumely that "I have you in my *eye*, sir," is a humiliation redoubled. Breaking, as it does, the classical taboo against looking directly at the king, his gaze also links the medical with the juridical subjection of George. But one suspects the Rasputin-like qualities of Bennett's Dr. Willis are a literary invention. George III was, in fact, attended by two Dr. Willis's (brothers). But Dr. Thomas Willis lived 100 years prior to King George's phorphyritic episodes. Foucault describes *The Birth of the Clinic* as "a book about space, about language, and about death; it is about the act of seeing, the gaze."[5] The gaze Foucault here examines, by which, "in a few years, the particular knowledge of the individual patient was structured,"[6] is his metaphor for our new way of seeing. That gaze, again deployed in *Discipline & Punish,* is there a metaphor for a corollary structuring—the panoptic organization of modern society—of an increasingly efficient surveillance, the arraying of individuals in a homogeneous space under the watchful eye of the warder, the teacher, and the factory foreman. It is with this disciplinary gaze, too, that Willis holds the king in check. Bennett's Willis, by his gaze, links the two works.

Under Willis's care at Kew, George asks his visiting lord chancellor and Pitt whether they are cold. Why? Because, George replies, he makes the weather "by mental powers." Thurlow berates Willis for promising to cure the king and failing. But it is because George is no longer a Shakespearean king, a Lear on the stormswept heath whose madness is personified by the weather, that his claim is now taken as a sign of madness. It's exactly this kind of idea Willis has been called upon to reform. Lear, in an Age of Kings, is author of his own sorrows. But not hapless George, who, caught in a whirlpool of history, flung into the Age of Man, is the sport of fate and subject to the as yet unperfected technologies of social control.

Shakespeare in the park

But the return of George's sanity is accomplished, Bennett tempts us to believe, not by Willis's gaze but by a deeply affecting performance of a scene from *King Lear.* As lucid and warm as the sunlight under which Nigel Hawthorne's George lovingly performs it, coaxing and correcting his actors who read the play seated on chairs in an idyllic field, the scene builds to a moment of wondrous realization and restoration. At first chary of accepting the change the lord chancellor now sees in him, George slowly perceives in this willingness to see him as recovered a difference. Since the difference is no difference, really, the king realizes it must consist in his having forgotten something. The light slowly dawning in his eyes, he pronounces his own cure as fondly as he has caressed Shakespeare's

words. "I have always been myself, even when I was ill, only now I seem myself. And that's the important thing. . . . I have remembered how to seem."

However, lest we take too much consolation from the salutary effects of Shakespeare, this cure by the acting of plays was, Foucault points out (on the page opposite his quotation from Willis's *Opera Omnia*), another technique of the classical age, one applied hand in glove with the sterner medicines. Dubbed "The Cure by Theatrical Representation," it stands as the polar opposite to Willis's physical interventions. "Here, the therapeutic operation functions entirely in the space of the imagination."[7]

But if "seeming" to be king somehow got lost with George's madness, what is it George forgot? At his most agitated, George regressively insists on his divine right to take any female where and whenever he wishes, and furthermore maintains that his thoughts are the thoughts of God, and that—grabbing a maid's chamber-pot during a morning frenzy, crying as he strains to relieve himself, "Do it, England"—his body is co-extensive with the whole of England. In short, George, like Lear, is confusing the past with the present. But where Lear yearns to be cared for by his daughters as he was by his mother, George's wish is for a return to the classical idea of himself as king.

What George is in danger of forgetting from the start is that he no longer is a king as conceived of in the classical age. His peculiar tragedy is that no one can explain the shift in perspective that requires his worldview be radically readjusted. Instead, these changes are inflicted on him—by the application of heated cups, of gags, restraints, and powerful purgatives—through a succession of painful humiliations to his flesh meant to lead his mind to the dawn of the light of truth. George, by his unique position, has to receive those changes alone until he is able to articulate them. Only the king could. It is his singular tragedy. But that this change in consciousness should be exacted through the king's body is no mere historical curiosity or unkind feature of a more primitive medical practice. A comprehensive system of control over human beings must begin with control over the body, from the smallest parts to the whole. The aim of disciplinary technology is to forge "a docile (body) that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."[8] George's physical humiliations are the first awkward coercions of a new regimen soon to be extended across the whole of society.

Once George recognizes he is himself again, Thurlow races back to Westminster to forestall the vote on the Regency bill. Awaiting George's arrival, Hytner's camera, in a scene of self-reflexive parody, does a dizzying circuit about Thurlow as he giddily relates their performance to Pitt, suggesting that Lear's ending would be improved and the tragedy averted if the messenger were only to arrive on time. (It's a telling commentary on the action by virtue of its very anachronism; between 1681 and the early 19th century, Nahum Tate's bowdlerized *Lear* containing just this amendment was the only version extant in England, a version now often derided as being "Hollywood.") And so George pulls up in his carriage, the M.P.'s race out just as they're about to vote, and, having reassured them he is his old self once again, George turns to his supporters and remarks, "How's that, boys? Not bad, what, what."

Yet Bennett evokes a terrible poignancy as he at last reunites George with his devoted queen, having them share once again their loving jest of address: "Hello, Mr. King." "Hello, Mrs. King." What at first utterance was merely a sweet private joke has now become a formal declaration of their new state of affairs. For while America and France were having revolutions, the British, by setting the king on his head, were quietly reshaping their national psyche in his person; that is, specifically, exorcising from his mind and body, through the newly devolving authority vested in medicine and the law, the madness that therein resided God and England.

CRAIG TEPPER

■ Craig Tepper is a screen and television writer among whose credits is *Double Jeopardy*.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 163.
2. Ibid., p. 162.
3. Thomas Willis, *Opera Omnia* (Lyons, 1681), Vol. II, p. 261.
4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 40.
5. Op. cit., p. ix.
6. Ibid., p. 196.
7. Michel Foucault, *Madness & Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 187.
8. *Discipline & Punish*, p. 139.

Book Reviews

The Cinema in France

After the New Wave

By Jill Forbes. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993. $35.00 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Though it displays little of the élan of its subject, Jill Forbes' *The Cinema in France: After the New Wave* performs a signal service in reminding us, once again, how contested the phrase "film history" should be but rarely ever is. Her approach, and her prose, are altogether too flat-footed to make reading this book an active *pleasure*, but it's important nevertheless.

Through her lengthy and often intelligent close readings of fascinating French films of the last 25 years that have never been released in the United States, Forbes demonstrates that any given national cinema is always going to be immensely more complicated than even an informed student of it can ever know. What *is* the corpus of a specific national cinema? All the films that are produced in that country or all the films that are distributed in the film historian's own country? And how does one decide between the "commercial" films (since all films are of necessity commercial films) and "auteurist" films?

Forbes' book opens, for example (after a useful historical and economic contextualization of the post-1968, post-New Wave French film industry), by comparing Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972), a film that is well-known, partially owing to the fame of its director, to the nearly unknown but equally innovative *Coup pour coup* (1972), made by Marin Karmitz, now known primarily as a producer and distributor. The first thing that Forbes achieves through this inspired juxtaposition is to enrich the experience of Godard's film by reading it within the context of Karmitz's film; even more importantly, she unequivocally demonstrates how much the absence of *Coup pour coup* has impoverished our sense of French film history of the last two decades.

Thoughtful, complicated discussions of film-makers such as Luc Moullet, Philippe Garrel, Jean Eustache, and Jacques Doillon—film-makers whose names are perhaps known to non-specialist film historians, but whose work has rarely been seen in the U.S.—have the cumulative effect of overwhelming the reader with a sense of loss. By the last page of the book, where Forbes lists many of her own favorite films of the 1970s and 1980s—all of them, films and directors, completely unknown, to this reader at least—the disappointment is complete. Thus her final hope that her book can help to "persuade conservative viewers and, above all, distributors of the value and interest of the undeservedly unfamiliar" (261), seems naïve, especially given the fact that some of these films are nearly 20 years old.

Though the dissertation style of *The Cinema in France* is grating, probably the single biggest weakness of the book concerns Forbes' choices concerning whom and what to include and whom and what to leave out. She says early on that she won't speak about Jean-Jacques Beineix, Léos Carax, and Luc Besson because they have already received the lion's share of the meager attention doled out to French film in the English-speaking world. Fair enough. But she has also decided to omit the post-1968 work of Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer, and Resnais, on the grounds that "their period of innovative influence was over," a shaky claim indeed. And though she provides us with excellent, informed sociopolitical readings of Godard's work for television, she says nothing about *King Lear, Prénom: Carmen*, or *Je vous salue Marie*. She offers provocative, in-depth studies of women directors Marguerite Duras and Agnès Varda, usefully points out the ways in which gender is always elided in discussion of 1970s and 1980s films made by men, critiques the films of Blier and Pialat from a revealing and nuanced feminist perspective—and then doesn't even mention such important women directors as Claire Denis, Diane Kurys, or Nelly Kaplan.

These faults are more than made up for, though, by Forbes' success in placing the films she *does* discuss in the context of French politics and culture, and most specifically, within the dual context of the New Wave and the "evénéments de mai 1968." She herself questions how appropriate her auteurist focus is "in the period of post-structuralism," but surely she is right to suggest that "for the post-1968 French film maker to be or not to be an *auteur* is to adopt a position in relation to the industry, to the *nouvelle vague*, to gender, and to the audience," and it is thus crucial to any reading of these films. Her discussion of Bertrand Tavernier's films as a reaction to the *nouvelle vague*, which roughly occupies the position in film history that Postimpression occupies in the history of modern art, helps us understand that there have always been *lots* of things going on in French cinema, and they don't all lead back to Truffaut. Nevertheless, her insistence on the centrality of the New Wave—as a movement to be emulated or rejected—is exactly right, for in this it is similar to the way that the monumentality of Neo-realism influenced, positively or negatively, all subsequent Italian cinema.

Other useful chapters discuss the relation of French and American genre films (concentrating especially on the underrated Alain Corneau, who most recently directed *Tous les matins du monde*), the reinvention of the history film by René Allio and André Téchiné, under the influence of Foucault and the *annalistes*, the crisis of masculinity in Bertrand Blier and others, and the relations of the body and the text in Duras and Varda.

PETER BRUNETTE

■ Peter Brunette is completing a book on Michelangelo Antonioni for Cambridge University Press.

Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema

Edited by Wimal Dissanayake. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994. $29.95 cloth; $13.95 paper.

In his general introduction to *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, editor Wimal Dissanayake follows a tradition of political theory, exemplified by Ernest Gellner and Homi Bhabha, that asserts the indeterminacy of nationalism. In his account, national identity is an ongoing historical construct rather than the expression of an unchanging or self-evident "national soul." Dissanayake criticizes the leaders of many Asian nation states for concealing or repressing other possible forms of collective identity under a deceptively monolithic, unitary vision of the "eternal" national character: "Cinema has the power and the obligation to represent the multiple and incompatible differences that are folded into the privileged and monological narrative of nationhood" (xxvi). *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* therefore demands the preservation of a popular counter-memory.

In one of the most provocative essays of this anthology, Graeme Turner acknowledges that many nationalist programs have anti-democratic, racist, and/or neo-imperialist consequences. He nonetheless insists that the construction of a national culture need not suppress or exclude internal differences. By depicting the heterogeneous histories that constitute the distinctiveness of Australian identity, films can in fact empower different constituencies by helping them recognize and articulate their distinct experiences. Turner therefore forcefully advocates preserving the idea of an Australian national cinema, backed by government subsidies, quota systems, and other protectionistic measures. He contends that many colonial and postcolonial film industries have to rely on extensive state regulation and planning in order to compensate for the unequal distribution of resources throughout the world economic system. To give up the idea of a national cinema is to surrender local voices to the global forces of cultural imperialism.

Turner's essay is a provocative attempt to do justice to both the intrinsic dangers and emancipatory possibilities of the national question in a postcolonial situation. As Chris Berry aptly suggests in his own contribution to this volume, we need to carefully delineate the particular circumstances of different film industries and national contexts on a case-by-case basis, rather than simply dismissing all nationalisms as oppressive constructs. Patriotic movements can, for instance, foster the emancipation of colonized or neo-colonized groups in their struggles against European and American capital. But Berry nonetheless contends that, once fully consolidated, all nation-states have an inherent tendency to impose a spurious rejection of all official nationalisms, calling for oppositional film-makers to break down the unity of nation-states "into a kaleidoscopic array of fleeting quasi-national sites for collective identification. . . " (52). His argument for an incessant play of differences is intelligently formulated, cogently argued, and rooted in persuasive textual analyses of contemporary films from the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. But his one-sided call for the subversion of nation-states leads to an over-simplification of Asian politics and history. In particular, he fails to see how nations can sometimes serve emancipatory projects, in the manner discussed by Graeme Turner. Berry, for instance, rather rashly criticizes Taiwan's opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party, for using overtly patriotic rhetoric in demanding the island's political independence from China.

Chris Berry's essay nonetheless constitutes a serious and succinct attempt at fulfilling the theoretical program outlined by Dissanayake in his introduction: to explore the connection between economic imperialism, state-building, and cultural identity. Unfortunately, other contributions to this rather uneven collection fall short of this task. The essays tend to be nothing more than informative, though trivial, enumerations of factual material. Isolde Standish lucidly summarizes the impact of South Korean policy-making on the cinema since the 60s, tracing the ways in which local films have interpreted, promoted, and sometimes contested the authoritarian directives of the Economic Planning Board and other administrative agencies. It is a competent and elegant account which nonetheless lacks a sophisticated theoretical framework. In a similar vein, John Charlot's

Other useful chapters discuss the relation of French and American genre films (concentrating especially on the underrated Alain Corneau, who most recently directed *Tous les matins du monde*), the reinvention of the history film by René Allio and André Téchiné, under the influence of Foucault and the *annalistes*, the crisis of masculinity in Bertrand Blier and others, and the relations of the body and the text in Duras and Varda.

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impressionistic description of Vietnamese cinema is obviously based on a series of random screenings and interviews rather than a profound familiarity with the local film industry. Instead of a rigorous historical analysis, the reader is offered a rather casual outline of recurrent trends and themes in Vietnam's cinema: the use of poetic symbols, national allegories, melodramatic codes, etc. The result is, again, clean and informative, but Charlot's writing is journalistic rather than scholarly. Perhaps the most unfortunate contribution to this anthology, however, remains Patricia Lee Masters' discussion of Japanese war films. She repeatedly inserts quotations from Ooka Shohei's novel *Fires on the Plain* as if they were accurate descriptions of individual sequences in Ichikawa's film, thus inexplicably conflating the original book with its cinematic adaptation.

Annette Hamilton's perceptive essay on Thailand goes further in its analytical ambition and theoretical sophistication, but she introduces Walter Benjamin's (too) familiar work on mechanical reproduction without fully integrating it into her overall historical argument. One is left with the uneasy feeling that Benjamin's comments are at best tangentially relevant to the film industry under consideration. Hamilton's work nonetheless raises important questions about the diverse cultural preferences and interests of working-class and rural viewers, Westernized middle-class intellectuals, and conservative power elites. Hamilton persuasively shows that Thailand's film-makers and audiences do not constitute a homogeneous monolith: "The struggle over representation in Thailand is a struggle between the interests and ideological perspectives of these three segments" (145). This is surely a potentially fruitful approach to the sociology of film production and reception that deserves a more detailed discussion.

Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema does fill a glaring gap in contemporary cinema studies. Both the scholar and general reader will find clear and instructive accounts of various national film industries that tend to receive almost no attention in American publications. Dissanayake's effort is therefore a welcome one, but the essays he has selected often lack the theoretical rigor to be expected of a scholarly publication. One can only hope that this important, though flawed, book will be followed by more complete and meticulous studies of various Asian cinemas.

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High Concept

Movies and Marketing in Hollywood

By Justin Wyatt. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994. $35.00 cloth; $17.95 paper.

Justin Wyatt examines the high concept film—its stylistic features and its economic identity—as a marketing phenomenon. A high concept film, like *Total Recall, Jaws, Batman,* or *Top Gun,* has a conceptual premise and narrative that is easily reducible to a catchy phrase or striking image; this hook then becomes the basis for an aggressive advertising campaign keyed to a wave of related product merchandising. Wyatt suggests that high concept film-making is a key mode of post-classical Hollywood film-making which is closely tied to the rise of diversified corporate control in the film industry and the importance of ancillary markets. Wyatt suggests, justifiably, I believe, that *Grease, Jaws, Star Wars,* and *Saturday Night Fever* are "of much greater significance to American film history than the critically and institutionally recognized films of the period, such as *All That Jazz, Network* (1976), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979)." Wyatt's is the first systematic and extended account of the aesthetics of high concept films and the economic factors which nourish them.

He begins at the micro-level by discussing the aesthetic elements of high concept style. These include a kind of modular narrative populated by characters who are underdeveloped psychologically but who are strongly defined as visual or social types (e.g., the Tom Cruise and Richard Gere characters in *Top Gun* and *American Gigolo*). The narrative structure places these character types against familiar generic backgrounds and often incorporates extended musical segments which assist in the film's marketing via music videos. Furthermore, Wyatt suggests a distinctive production design typifies high concept, strongly defining the "look" of the films. Wyatt considers this design to be composed of "extreme backlighting, a minimal (often almost black-and-white) color scheme, a predominance of reflected images, and a tendency toward settings of high technology and industrial design."

He argues that this is an advertising-oriented style linked to the work of directors such as Adrian Lyne and Ridley and Tony Scott, who all began as directors of television commercials. While the design elements are indeed especially strong in their films and seem to work as Wyatt suggests—in an anti-narrative direction by emphasizing and encouraging the contemplation of formal design—high concept film-making may be more aes-

impressionistic description of Vietnamese cinema is obviously based on a series of random screenings and interviews rather than a profound familiarity with the local film industry. Instead of a rigorous historical analysis, the reader is offered a rather casual outline of recurrent trends and themes in Vietnam's cinema: the use of poetic symbols, national allegories, melodramatic codes, etc. The result is, again, clean and informative, but Charlot's writing is journalistic rather than scholarly. Perhaps the most unfortunate contribution to this anthology, however, remains Patricia Lee Masters' discussion of Japanese war films. She repeatedly inserts quotations from Ooka Shohei's novel *Fires on the Plain* as if they were accurate descriptions of individual sequences in Ichikawa's film, thus inexplicably conflating the original book with its cinematic adaptation.

Annette Hamilton's perceptive essay on Thailand goes further in its analytical ambition and theoretical sophistication, but she introduces Walter Benjamin's (too) familiar work on mechanical reproduction without fully integrating it into her overall historical argument. One is left with the uneasy feeling that Benjamin's comments are at best tangentially relevant to the film industry under consideration. Hamilton's work nonetheless raises important questions about the diverse cultural preferences and interests of working-class and rural viewers, Westernized middle-class intellectuals, and conservative power elites. Hamilton persuasively shows that Thailand's film-makers and audiences do not constitute a homogeneous monolith: "The struggle over representation in Thailand is a struggle between the interests and ideological perspectives of these three segments" (145). This is surely a potentially fruitful approach to the sociology of film production and reception that deserves a more detailed discussion.

Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema does fill a glaring gap in contemporary cinema studies. Both the scholar and general reader will find clear and instructive accounts of various national film industries that tend to receive almost no attention in American publications. Dissanayake's effort is therefore a welcome one, but the essays he has selected often lack the theoretical rigor to be expected of a scholarly publication. One can only hope that this important, though flawed, book will be followed by more complete and meticulous studies of various Asian cinemas.

HECTOR RODRIQUEZ

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High Concept

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Justin Wyatt examines the high concept film—its stylistic features and its economic identity—as a marketing phenomenon. A high concept film, like *Total Recall, Jaws, Batman,* or *Top Gun,* has a conceptual premise and narrative that is easily reducible to a catchy phrase or striking image; this hook then becomes the basis for an aggressive advertising campaign keyed to a wave of related product merchandising. Wyatt suggests that high concept film-making is a key mode of post-classical Hollywood film-making which is closely tied to the rise of diversified corporate control in the film industry and the importance of ancillary markets. Wyatt suggests, justifiably, I believe, that *Grease, Jaws, Star Wars,* and *Saturday Night Fever* are "of much greater significance to American film history than the critically and institutionally recognized films of the period, such as *All That Jazz, Network* (1976), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979)." Wyatt's is the first systematic and extended account of the aesthetics of high concept films and the economic factors which nourish them.

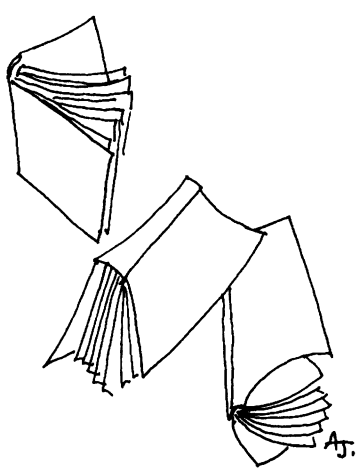
He begins at the micro-level by discussing the aesthetic elements of high concept style. These include a kind of modular narrative populated by characters who are underdeveloped psychologically but who are strongly defined as visual or social types (e.g., the Tom Cruise and Richard Gere characters in *Top Gun* and *American Gigolo*). The narrative structure places these character types against familiar generic backgrounds and often incorporates extended musical segments which assist in the film's marketing via music videos. Furthermore, Wyatt suggests a distinctive production design typifies high concept, strongly defining the "look" of the films. Wyatt considers this design to be composed of "extreme backlighting, a minimal (often almost black-and-white) color scheme, a predominance of reflected images, and a tendency toward settings of high technology and industrial design."

He argues that this is an advertising-oriented style linked to the work of directors such as Adrian Lyne and Ridley and Tony Scott, who all began as directors of television commercials. While the design elements are indeed especially strong in their films and seem to work as Wyatt suggests—in an anti-narrative direction by emphasizing and encouraging the contemplation of formal design—high concept film-making may be more aes-

thetically diverse than he admits. His own list of high concept films includes many that do not seem to greatly emphasize backlighting, de-saturated colors, reflections, or high-tech landscapes: *Jaws, Grease, The Natural, The Untouchables, Wayne's World.*

A more comprehensive exploration of high concept image design would consider the relative emphasis of these elements across diverse productions and their co-existence with other design elements and approaches. High concept designs may be less monolithic and more diverse than Wyatt admits, in part because the name "high concept" is a somewhat fluid designation, with diffuse parameters and a wide range of productions. A more nuanced account of high concept aesthetics, sensitive to its shadings and registers, could certainly be developed from the general outline Wyatt provides.

His analysis of image design as it carries over into print advertising is more convincing and is bolstered by instructive comparisons of print ads for high and low concept films. Wyatt examines, for example, ads for *Jaws* and *Nashville,* and explains why the former, but not the latter, film lent itself so successfully to visual summary as a potent advertising image (in this case, the giant shark beneath the solitary female swimmer). The "look" of a high concept film is easily replicated in diverse marketing materials which then extend the "shelf life" of a film and help maintain viewer awareness of the production. Low concept films, more ambiguous in their image design and narrative, do not lend themselves so effectively to such marketing. "A movie such as *The Sheltering Sky* cannot be reduced to a publicity still. The style of this film does not permit its reduction to a tool of marketing."



In subsequent chapters, Wyatt traces the structural shifts in the film industry—primarily corporate diversification and expansion into the ancillary film markets—that motivate high concept as a film style and as a production and marketing tool. Much of this discussion will be familiar to observers of the contemporary industry, but it is useful to have such a compact summary of the major trends in studio ownership and in the merchandising and marketing that routinely accompany production and distribution.

Throughout the book, Wyatt avoids polemics and writes in a cautious and nonjudgmental manner about the phenomena he describes. While this even-handedness may be methodologically commendable, a certain dryness of tone results as he avoids making strong arguments. In the final and best chapter, however, Wyatt adopts a stronger and more engaged stance as he explores the prominence of market research in the industry and argues that the methodologies of market research privilege high concept film-making. To the extent that the industry depends on market research to test new production, it will be biased in favor of those concepts which can be easily tested—namely, the high concepts. Wyatt's former experience as a market research analyst serves him well here, and this chapter is the most compelling in the book. It also presents the results of an empirical study he designed examining those variables that affect the box-office performance of high and low concept films. The study is extremely interesting, but its design and results might have been discussed at greater length and integrated more systematically into the structure of the book. As the book is presently structured, the study is covered quickly and as a parenthetical element within the more general discussion of market research.

Wyatt's analysis of high concept movies and marketing offers an informative descriptive profile of the complex merchandising networks within which major studio films are conceived and distributed. The niching of film within integrated leisure-time markets is a profound feature of post-classical Hollywood. Wyatt examines the interaction of aesthetics and economics inherent in this phenomenon. While the aesthetic analysis seems a bit prescriptive and could be more systematic, he is sensitive to the special intimacy between economics and aesthetics that the high concept films privilege. Despite its dry tone, this book is a good introduction to the current economic realities of major studio film-making.

STEPHEN PRINCE

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The Michael Snow Project Publication Series

Visual Art, 1951–1993

Exploring Plane and Contour

By Dennis Reid, Philip Monk, and Louise Dompierre. Ontario: Random House of Canada, 1994. $37.00 Canadian.

Music/Sound, 1948–1993

Edited by Michael Snow. Ontario: Random House of Canada, 1994. $33.00 Canadian.

The Collected Writings of Michael Snow

By Michael Snow. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994. $29.95 U.S.

Evidently, there's been a lot of Snow in Canada lately. A massive series of museum and gallery expositions in Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario and The Power Plant recently celebrated the work of the Canadian avant-gardist, and these presentations have led now to a gigantic publishing venture. There are currently three volumes in The Michael Snow Project Publication Series: *Music/Sound, 1948–1993*, which deals, in the words of its subtitle, with "The Performed and Recorded Music/Sound of Michael Snow, Solo and with Various Ensembles, His Sound-Films and Sound Installations"; *Visual Art, 1951–1993: Exploring Plane and Contour*, which deals with "The Drawing, Painting, Collage, Foldage, Photo-Work, Sculpture and Films"; and *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, which assembles published and unpublished pieces by Snow (including interviews, record liners, random jottings, film scripts, and so on). (A fourth volume, *Presence and Absence: The Films of Michael Snow, 1956–1991*, published, after this review was written, by Random House of Canada, brings together secondary studies on Snow by such luminaries as Jonas Mekas, Annette Michelson, and Bruce Elder.)

From these first three volumes, one can extract reiterations of many of the themes that Snow criticism has concentrated on: the conceptuality of an art that focuses on its own processes of fabrication; the concern in an age of modernity or postmodernity with an art that crosses media boundaries and even opens the realm of the aesthetic up to the contagions of electronics and mass reproduction; the interactions of calculated control and randomness and improvisation in modern art production; the dialectic of representation and abstraction; the responsiveness (or not) of avant-gardism to popular culture, everyday life, and the public sphere.

In addition, *Music/Sound* refreshingly brings to light a thematic that one doesn't necessarily associate with Snow—or with our standard notions of the loner avant-gardist stumbling out ahead of the Social. In the volume's discussion of Snow's jazz career (and in Snow's own characterizations in the volume on that career), there is a continued emphasis on the effort of the artist's efforts *as necessarily and essentially Social, collective even.* Jazz is offered up as salutarily a group effort, and this concern for art's sharedness then spills over into the discussion of the film work, which Snow and the volume present as collective too, as involving the insertion of the individual artist into ongoing movements, coherent institutions. This emphasis on the social nature of art—of Snow's art—is an intriguing one and might encourage new forms of reflection on the politics of modernist experimentation.

The more than 1100 pages of the volumes published thus far offer up an image of the artist in which every detail, every practice, every event, is made the object of intense fetishism, intense hagiography. Take, for instance, *Visual Art*. The more than 500 pages of this volume contain three full-length studies of phases of Snow's career, intercut with myriad documents and art reproductions: a rigorously constructed precise chronology; three extensive bibliographies; and detailed and carefully crafted photos of all the major works (often from several angles). Moreover, even though one might assume interest in Snow to center on *Wavelength* (and indeed the central section of *Visual Art* is entitled "Around *Wavelength*"), the volume gives even more attention to Snow's career before his move into cinema. For example, expanding our knowledge of the artist's career beyond (or before) our habitual acquaintance with it, the first section of *Visual Art*, by Dennis Reid, divides the pre-cinema career itself into a plethora of detailed phases. The sheer mass of precision about the phases in Reid's discussion, the rhetoric of his descriptions, gives evidence of an adulatory fascination that tips from analysis into breathless and uncritical evocation and enthusiasm. Typical (and chosen virtually at random by me) is Reid's paean to a painted sculpture entitled *A Day*: "*A Day* combines aspects of *Quilts, Window*, and *Colour Booth* with a confident legerdemain that is breathtaking. It suggests a window, a ladder, an easel, a painting in space. Defiantly planar, it is remarkably engaging in the round. Stirring in its relationships of colour, line, plane, space, it is witty too. . . . What is perhaps most affecting, however, is the sense of urgency implied in the brilliant

cobbling together of whatever incongruous scraps of wood and tube-ends of paint were to hand to achieve its precise arrangements of form and colour and dynamic space" (*Visual Art*, 82).

The volumes of the Michael Snow Project seem to cover all of the work, then, in intensely loving detail. Their richness is overwhelming and gives the impression that no fact of the career has been overlooked. The closest thing perhaps to this adorational recreation of all the steps of the avant-gardist career are the several volumes of *The Legend of Maya Deren*, a biography-cum-study that was in the works through the late 1970s and early 1980s. Like *The Legend of Maya Deren*, the Michael Snow Project appears to want to capture every aspect, every anecdote of the career, although it eschews the chronology of the earlier hagiography to concentrate instead on generic divisions across chronology.

But the differences between the two exercises of critical love are instructive. The Maya Deren volumes give almost more attention to the life of the artist than they do to the artist's creations. There is the implication that life itself matters, that art isn't everything, whereas much of the rhetoric of the Michael Snow Project has to do with life's transcendence by art, with the sense that what an artist does in the effort of expression has a special vitality, a privileged existence, above and beyond anything the artist does practically as a person.

This connects up to a second difference between the two hagiographies. Coming out, as they did, in the moment of feminist reconstruction of lives "hidden from history," the volumes of *The Legend of Maya Deren* seem driven to a large degree by a sentiment that life itself can be artful, and thereby can be a matter of loving reconstruction and admiration. The Michael Snow Project, on the other hand, appears governed by a sense that what needs evocation, reconstruction, and recitation is the intensity of the work itself as transcending material issues such as gender. In fact, many of the anecdotes that the volumes of the Michael Snow Project recount have to do with establishing the joyful and productive interplays of male buddies, of good-time guys for whom little else matters than the creation of Art (in this case, jazz). This concern with the anecdotes of art over the anecdotes of life reaches an extreme in *Music/Sound,* where one long section is devoted to a transcription, as unedited as possible, of a conversation between Snow and some of his jazz buddies. In contrast to the concern in *The Legend of Maya Deren* to offer life up for (feminist) interpretation—so much so that the volume editors even turn to an astrologist to uncover additional significations of the life of Deren—the transcription in *Music/Sound* provides little interpretation and becomes instead an endless litany of guys hanging around, bonding, having a good creative time.

Beyond differences in their respective treatments of their subjects, *The Legend of Maya Deren* and the Michael Snow Project differ also at a sheer material level, a level that itself reflects larger differences in the kind of institutional backing each project had (or didn't). The Maya Deren volumes had a long history of funding problems and, even as loving as the books finally turned out to be, there is a roughness to them, evident most immediately in the restriction to black-and-white photography. In contrast, the Random House of Canada volumes of the Michael Snow Project radiate an adorational desire to make the books into quasi-art objects themselves, virtual offerings at the altar of Snow. These are beautiful tomes, rich in their iconography, seductive in their feel, stunning in their sheer physicality. Beyond the contingent conditions that made the Maya Deren volumes as they were and turned out the Snow volumes as they are, one senses that it is typically the guy who gets the more impressive treatment in cases such as this.

Indeed, while the issue of gender flits through the volumes of the Michael Snow Project (for example, in the virtually marginalized references every now and then to Joyce Wieland), it is rarely rendered explicit, rarely held up for any sort of critical investigation. Certainly, it is useful for anyone working on avant-garde criticism to have this mass of information on this man, but it is sobering nonetheless to wonder about the fact that it is generally the male artists who are granted the right to four volumes of beautiful study. These volumes of the Michael Snow Project should be read alongside Lauren Rabinovitz's *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943–1971* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), which tries to find a place for a woman's voice in experimental film and even devotes extended attention to Joyce Wieland.

More generally, just as the Michael Snow volumes give little attention to the politics of gender, they are also not much concerned with the issue of politics. For all the concern of these books to celebrate Snow as a *Canadian* artist, there is little direct reflection on issues of nationalism—of, for example, dependencies and balances of power between Canada and the U.S.

To be sure, the three tomes are artist catalogs, meant to celebrate exhibitions and showings. The genre of the catalog is frequently (but not always and not necessarily) one that brackets out political issues. But given the ways Snow himself often makes political gestures with his work, and given also the ways in which that work tries to challenge certain ideologies of the beautifully polished oeuvre, one might have welcomed an approach to Snow that would be a little less purely celebratory and a little more critically probing. Perhaps the volume of secondary critical studies has taken up the slack. In the mean-

time, the three volumes stand as aesthetically rich and vibrant odes for the student of the avant-garde to revel in luxuriously.

DANA POLAN

■ Dana Polan is the director of the Paris Center for Critical Studies.

Naming the Other

Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television

By Martin Blythe. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995. $39.50.

Surveying feature films, newsreels, miniseries, and documentaries, Martin Blythe's *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television* manages to cover a great deal of territory without becoming an encyclopedic listing of types and stereotypes. Blythe provides probably the most rigorous examination yet of this body of material, though there have been excellent essays published in New Zealand journals like *Illusions* and *Site* and in Jonathan Dennis and Jan Bieringa's first-rate anthology, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1992). In the process, Blythe also offers an intriguing take on how the situation in New Zealand can illuminate more general issues concerning race, colonialism, postcolonialism, ethnography, and national identity.

By its very title, *Naming the Other* points toward what ought to be a central concern in studies of national cinemas, multicultural representation, and figurations of the Other: How does the critic organize and construct a representation of representations, an image of images? How does the critic name some other's Other? Blythe acknowledges from the outset the existence of "many New Zealands," which are best understood chronologically as a series of master narratives and "social-historical models" for explaining the relations between the indigenous Maori and the Pakeha (that is, the primarily British settlers) or perhaps for solving the "problem" of these relations. From this perspective, films and television programs become "allegories of cultural engagement" (10), and the key task is to study how the Maori have over time been textually incorporated into or excluded from the dominant culture's discourse. In more formal terms, this often means linking questions of representation to questions of narrational authority and enunciation.

According to Blythe, Maori/Pakeha relations have been allegorized in three principal ways during the twentieth century. Through the 1930s, the nation was primarily figured as "Maoriland," a site for historical, imperial, touristic, or ethnographic romances that tell of the unification of the two cultures, usually by relegating the Maori to some timeless past or by eulogizing their fall into history. Hollywood-financed or -influenced treatments of the noble savage belong in this category, as does the ethnographic footage shot by James McDonald in 1919 to 1923 under the auspices of the National Museum, and also certain independently produced films of one of the most fascinating figures in New Zealand cinema, Rudall Hayward, whose depictions of the colonial period in *The Te Kooti Trail* (1927) and *Rewi's Last Stand* (1925, remade in 1940) present cross-racial love as doomed. Blythe's commentary on this particular allegory is effective precisely to the extent that he underscores the contradictions among these different versions of Maoriland, in part because of how and for whom they were produced.

After the 1940s, when newsreels offered images of a unified national identity, Maoriland was replaced by the myth of "New Zealand," a terrain increasingly marked by segregation, or at least by some acknowledgment that the "integration myth" failed to account for present-day conditions. Here the key texts are the National Film Unit's social problem documentaries dealing with contemporary Maori life and those films that focus on traditional Maori arts and folkways and thereby promote a sense of what Blythe calls "Maori essentialism" (117). An awareness of segregation is also evident in *Tangata Whenua* (1974), an important six-part documentary series that Blythe analyzes in some detail as a sort of Pakeha quest for Maori authenticity. This section points to one strength of *Naming the Other*: Blythe's wide range of cinematic examples that stretch well beyond feature films and well-received documentaries.

The early 1980s in New Zealand saw both the tax-shelter-driven expansion of the local feature film industry and the emergence of increasingly prominent demands for what Donna Awatere called "Maori sovereignty." In the third master narrative of national identity, New Zealand is replaced by "Aotearoa," a Maori domain irrevocably separate from any Pakeha colonialist impositions. Blythe traces the response to these demands and the dismantling of the "integration myth" through *The Governor* (1977)—a six-episode miniseries on the founding of the country and the biggest local television production of the 1970s—and through a number of feature films which, he argues, show that Pakeha film-makers could offer little more than outright repression of Maori demands or a revisionist embracing of blame, alienation, and guilt. The exceptions are *Utu* (1983), *Came a Hot Friday* (1985), and *Kingpin* (1985), which in

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different ways move toward biculturalism. If Blythe's categories and evaluations at times seem too pat, he still deserves credit for the range and argumentative ambitions of this study.

It is with these bicultural films and the first stirrings of Maori cinema that *Naming the Other* ends. Though this book was published in 1994, it is based on Blythe's 1988 UCLA dissertation, with little, if any, material on more recent film and television. It is one measure of Blythe's success, however, that his reading of New Zealand film and, more broadly, cultural history provides an excellent context from which to assess the racial dynamics of New Zealand's currently successful soap opera, *Shortland Street*, and two recent films that achieved much international acclaim, *The Piano* (1993) and *Once Were Warriors* (1994).

GREGORY A. WALLER

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Romance and the "Yellow Peril"

Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction

By Gina Marchetti. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. $40.00 cloth; $14.00 paper.

Although the contemporary notion of "race as our last frontier" is in many ways true, and although theoretical discussions on racism, nationalism, and colonialism have caught the attention of film researchers, it is an unfortunate fact that there are fewer than a dozen book-length scholarly English publications on the Hollywood portrayal of Africans, Latin Americans, or Asians. *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* is therefore a valuable contribution to the immensely important topic of Hollywood's treatment of the nonwhite races. (The 1991 anthology *Unspeakable Images* is another useful attempt to address the issue.) Gina Marchetti's ambitious study traces popular American cinematic depiction of interracial sexuality between Asians (mostly Chinese and Japanese) and American Caucasians from the teens up to the recent 80s. Narratives of rape, captivity, seduction, salvation, sacrifice, assimilation, and tragic and transcendental love, which have deep roots within Western culture, are used for the investigation of power, race, and identity.

Marchetti's analysis focuses on 17 films spread out over nine chapters. Some of these films, such as *Shanghai Express, My Geisha, Madame Butterfly, Sayonara,* and *The World of Suzie Wong,* are fairly well known and available at major video stores. Marchetti's research and discussion, however, are not limited to the films named in the headings of each chapter. Other related films, together with the sociopolitical situation of the time of their first release, are reviewed in relation to the theme of the chapter; the discussion thus provides a broad view of the issues while still remaining focused on the textual analysis of the specifics. These contextual analyses are an important strength of Marchetti's readings. In her discussion of *Broken Blossom*, for instance, she considers the tradition of melodrama, the child/virgin star image of Lilian Gish, the Victorian literary tradition of the rape narrative, and the specific expressions of racial tension in the U.S. during the teens (as epitomized in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, released in the same decade).

At various places in the analysis, however, the economic-political conditions could have been surveyed more comprehensively to reinforce the very points that Marchetti tries to make. For example, in the discussion of the film *Sayonara,* Marchetti's insight that Hollywood narratives were designed to evade the issue of the Korean war and its related moral dilemmas is well taken. It would be even more forcefully argued, however, if her brief introduction to the history of the Korean war had been amplified by an account of U.S. ambivalence toward the war, including the final recall of General MacArthur from Korea and his subsequent dismissal from military duty for openly criticizing the war policy of President Truman.

Using the Marxist notion of hegemony, Marchetti delineates how Hollywood discourse, and hence each of its individual texts, functions as part of a larger institutional discourse that participates in the construction of a racial hierarchy with the (white) race situated at the apex of the system. Seeing this attitude of classical orientalism—which takes the Orient as exotic, dangerous, and in need of Western control—as a residue of medieval European prejudices, Marchetti portrays a vivid form of racism that exists in the international policy and the popular culture of the contemporary United States. Again, though, the point could have been strengthened by investigating both the racist tradition of European Oriental studies and contemporary U.S. history.

Yet Marchetti does not see the kind of racism that exists in the U.S. as monolithic. In fact, she wisely points out that racism in the U.S. is always caught between contradictions: forbidding miscegenation while at the

different ways move toward biculturalism. If Blythe's categories and evaluations at times seem too pat, he still deserves credit for the range and argumentative ambitions of this study.

It is with these bicultural films and the first stirrings of Maori cinema that *Naming the Other* ends. Though this book was published in 1994, it is based on Blythe's 1988 UCLA dissertation, with little, if any, material on more recent film and television. It is one measure of Blythe's success, however, that his reading of New Zealand film and, more broadly, cultural history provides an excellent context from which to assess the racial dynamics of New Zealand's currently successful soap opera, *Shortland Street*, and two recent films that achieved much international acclaim, *The Piano* (1993) and *Once Were Warriors* (1994).

GREGORY A. WALLER

■ Gregory A. Waller teaches at the University of Kentucky.

Romance and the "Yellow Peril"

Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction

By Gina Marchetti. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. $40.00 cloth; $14.00 paper.

Although the contemporary notion of "race as our last frontier" is in many ways true, and although theoretical discussions on racism, nationalism, and colonialism have caught the attention of film researchers, it is an unfortunate fact that there are fewer than a dozen book-length scholarly English publications on the Hollywood portrayal of Africans, Latin Americans, or Asians. *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* is therefore a valuable contribution to the immensely important topic of Hollywood's treatment of the nonwhite races. (The 1991 anthology *Unspeakable Images* is another useful attempt to address the issue.) Gina Marchetti's ambitious study traces popular American cinematic depiction of interracial sexuality between Asians (mostly Chinese and Japanese) and American Caucasians from the teens up to the recent 80s. Narratives of rape, captivity, seduction, salvation, sacrifice, assimilation, and tragic and transcendental love, which have deep roots within Western culture, are used for the investigation of power, race, and identity.

Marchetti's analysis focuses on 17 films spread out over nine chapters. Some of these films, such as *Shanghai Express, My Geisha, Madame Butterfly, Sayonara,* and *The World of Suzie Wong,* are fairly well known and available at major video stores. Marchetti's research and discussion, however, are not limited to the films named in the headings of each chapter. Other related films, together with the sociopolitical situation of the time of their first release, are reviewed in relation to the theme of the chapter; the discussion thus provides a broad view of the issues while still remaining focused on the textual analysis of the specifics. These contextual analyses are an important strength of Marchetti's readings. In her discussion of *Broken Blossom*, for instance, she considers the tradition of melodrama, the child/virgin star image of Lilian Gish, the Victorian literary tradition of the rape narrative, and the specific expressions of racial tension in the U.S. during the teens (as epitomized in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, released in the same decade).

At various places in the analysis, however, the economic-political conditions could have been surveyed more comprehensively to reinforce the very points that Marchetti tries to make. For example, in the discussion of the film *Sayonara,* Marchetti's insight that Hollywood narratives were designed to evade the issue of the Korean war and its related moral dilemmas is well taken. It would be even more forcefully argued, however, if her brief introduction to the history of the Korean war had been amplified by an account of U.S. ambivalence toward the war, including the final recall of General MacArthur from Korea and his subsequent dismissal from military duty for openly criticizing the war policy of President Truman.

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same time taking pride in the ideology of the "melting pot." Thus her analysis is able to expose the equivocal or sometimes even contradictory nature of the Hollywood text. This is best exemplified in the chapter on *The Year of the Dragon*. Marchetti notes that spectacle, as a major icon of the film, "both attracts and repulses, encouraging viewer identification while keeping that involvement at a distance" (207). This spectatorial ambivalence is employed to generate a wide spectrum of meaning (interpretation) that cannot be ultimately determined. Unlike earlier films discussed in the book, the unfinalizing quality of this 80s film conveys a strong postmodern tone. The strength of the postmodern analysis also betrays a minor weakness, namely that there is no discussion of the transition of the classical Hollywood text of the 50s to the modern or postmodern text of the 80s. Perhaps the selection of a film from the 70s or early 80s would have helped to fill this gap.

Marchetti argues her points eloquently and convincingly. Her passion and dedication to her subject of inquiry is clear. In the preface, she implies that cine-feminism as a study of media construction of social hierarchy cannot avoid the issue of racism, which is an inseparable part of the complex and intertwined problem of the social construction of barriers. Her concern for ethno-feminism not only as an academic endeavor but as a political act which pursues social changes is a timely alarm bell in the current political climate of regressive conservatism.

JENNY KWOK WAH LAU

■ Jenny Kwok Wah Lau teaches film theory and history in the School of Film, Ohio University.

Unthinking Eurocentrism

Multiculturalism and the Media

By Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. New York: Routledge, 1994. $69.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Shohat and Stam have given us the most comprehensive, indeed, electrifying apologia for a polycentric, multicultural perspective and practice yet. Theirs is not a demonstration of what a marginalized but specific perspective—such as that of a lesbian Chicana like Cherie Moraga, a black gay male like Marlon Riggs, or a Chilean exile like Raul Ruiz—might see or say, nor an explanation of what contestatory, subversive movements from Brazilian anthropophagy to revisionist historiography might achieve. Instead it is a syncretic, carnivalesque celebration of what such individuals and initiatives might accomplish in aggregate. This accomplishment would break with the singularities of identity politics to inaugurate "a multifaceted polylog among all those interested in restructuring power in more egalitarian ways" (346). Such an ideal is clearly utopian and it is to this transformative, utopian spirit that their book is dedicated.

The all-embracing, equal-opportunity perspective of multiculturalism, though, is also easily coopted as the centerpiece of liberal, humanist tolerance. Who, other than the privileged but tolerant liberal or the controlling but egalitarian university administrator, can afford to put aside personal experience of injustices and indignities to insist on the equality of all? Shohat and Stam go to considerable pains to do what Sartre did so tellingly in *Anti-Semite and Jew*: to differentiate their *polycentric* perspective from all those efforts to preserve the liberal, if also guilty, consciousness of the Eurocentric tradition that can relativize everything but itself. From their revisionist interpretation of Columbus and the *reconquista* in Spain to their treatment of the figuration of empire, the uses and abuses of stereotypes, and the suppressed but discernible presence of race and ethnicity in seemingly non-ethnic, "mere" entertainment, Shohat and Stam count the ways in which Eurocentrism and humanist tolerance share a profound blind spot produced by presumptions of universality.

Although the authors have consumed a vast amount of material and turned it all to their own ends in the spirit of media jujitsu (using the enemy's strength to their own advantage) or anthropophagy (ingesting and absorbing diverse, eclectic traditions—including Eurocentrism—in order to effect a metabolic synthesis and transformation), they have given far more priority to examples and instances than to theory and concepts. Thoroughly informed as it is, this is less another book of theoretical interventions than a work attempting to make us see and act differently—not in accord with a governing theory but in the spirit of myriad examples of either subversive readings or contestatory practices. Examples cannot be successfully emulated through precise repetition. They do not specify the manner in which interpretations or practices should occur. The example "rubs off" rather than controls or determines. The classic trope of argument by example has a crucial place here; ironically, it is a rhetorical mode belonging most vividly to one of the central moments in the construction of a Eurocentric imaginary: the Renaissance.

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Renaissance writers used the words and deeds of the ancients as examples or models for contemporary conduct or decorum. The goal was to overcome the inad-

equate models of the recent dark ages by activating narratives centered around the exemplary thought and conduct of the heroes of antiquity. A parallel here might be Shohat and Stam's desire to overcome the inadequate models of bourgeois individualism and nation-state imperialism with examples that are "paramodern" and rooted in the egalitarian traditions of third and fourth world cultures ("para" rather than "pre" to reject the teleology of development toward a Eurocentric apotheosis). As Timothy Hampton notes in *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*, "Exemplarity aims at exhorting the reader to move from words to deeds, from language to action" (29), a goal abundantly evident in *Unthinking Eurocentrism* as well. With their plethora of examples and counter-examples drawn from Latin-American, African, Middle-Eastern, and some alternative media practice in the West, Shohat and Stam, then, use the trope of the example to exhort us toward a radical transformation of all hegemonic practices based on hierarchy and privilege. The goal seems nothing less than a reconstitution of the "arts of existence" (in Foucault's words) whereby we shall make our lives and art into an oeuvre that embodies egalitarian values and polycentric criteria.

But reliance on examples also poses a problem, if not a paradox. To serve as truly exemplary, the chosen example or model must be seen to escape or transcend its immediate moment. It must attain to what Hampton calls "momentary universality," where universality is, simultaneously—if fixed into principle, ontology, or essentialism—the fundamental obstacle to overcome. The example risks succumbing to a master narrative such as Christian salvation (or, to the extent it becomes just another "ism," polycentric multiculturalism) that ultimately reabsorbs the specificity and historical uniqueness of the example back into an ahistorical teleology. The diverse interpretations of the life of Jesus Christ provide a vivid, if not paradigmatic, example.

How do Shohat and Stam avoid this problem? Largely by tending toward what, after Jacobson, we might call an emulation of "similarity disorder," where the metonymic aspect of speech predominates over the metaphoric. Examples are strung together in a continual metonymic slide that resists condensation into a metaphor of principle or theory. Each example in this ever expandable series enjoys its moment of universality without attesting to the transcendent power of an underlying universalism. No one example achieves paradigmatic status. No governing law ensues. No final closure arrives. Like Kuhn's scientific paradigms, these polycentric, multicultural examples serve as models of proper conduct, practice, or decorum which fail to serve their purpose when reduced to rules or laws. The form of the book's narrative produces the effect of calling into being, or inventing, the utopian possibility and practical model to which the examples simultaneously attest.

If there are omissions, they tend to be of two sorts: one, a tendency to posit Eurocentrism as a consistent bias or even essentialism in ways that may sometimes simplify readings and praxis (for example, those who enjoy privilege should consider serving as "spies" [345] for those who don't); and two, an absence of reference to other critics and film-makers in the West who have contributed to aspects of the project to contest, refuse, or overthrow exploitation and hierarchy. (Exploitation and class, though included in the "mantra" of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, are, along with gay and lesbian struggle, noticeably underemphasized in comparison with what Shohat and Stam call "epidermal," nationalist, and ethnic hierarchies of oppression.)

In terms of readings, the Western film serves as an example of racism, with many fresh and cogent insights. The type of analysis offered by Will Wright in *Sixguns and Society*—one that would also posit a correlation between the development of capitalism and generic transformations in the Western—finds no place here. Ensuing complications such as the in-between or even outsider status of some Western heroes to their "own" communities remain unattended, giving a more black-and-white portrait than necessary. Eurocentric racism simply seems to take effect without the psychological/Marxist explanations of Sartre, the paranoid theory of Jameson (and others), or the historical specificities of Wright.

Similarly, the work of a wide range of people (from Les Blank to Judith Butler, from Connie Field to Rea Tajiri, and from Vito Russo and Tom Waugh to Julia Lesage, Chuck Kleinhans, Jane Gaines, Christine Gledhill, and Ann Kaplan) as well as the overall efforts of contributors to journals like *Women & Film, Jump Cut, Cineaste, Cine Action,* and *CineTracts* or members of groups like San Francisco, California, New York, or Third World Newsreel, receives little or no acknowledgment. Some of these figures, along with others like Sartre or John Berger, are more classically Marxist or more identified with particular forms of identity politics than is the polycentrism of Shohat and Stam, and this book is clearly a radical departure from both the neo-formalism, cognitive study, and psychoanalytic-based feminism that are also not referred to significantly. The degree to which their call for multicultural media studies is made in the absence of a genealogy of or debate with the efforts to champion similar goals is nonetheless something of a disappointment.

Unthinking Eurocentrism is a work of remarkable force. Its limitations do not corrode its achievement. Assault on the new world order, transnational corporations, and the global economy may be of necessity ob-

lique rather than frontal, built from the stories that fragments, affinities, and examples can be used to tell rather than from master narratives with their teleological entailments. The book itself serves as a model of polycentric multiculturalism that exhorts us to move from word to deed. This aspiration to a non-essentialized, anti-reductive polycentric multiculturalism may not be the sole instrument of assault or subversion, but it is, inescapably, the ground and precondition for any revolutionary movement, symbolic or real, that we may henceforth imagine.

BILL NICHOLS

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SIDNEY GOTTLIEB

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Letter to the Editor

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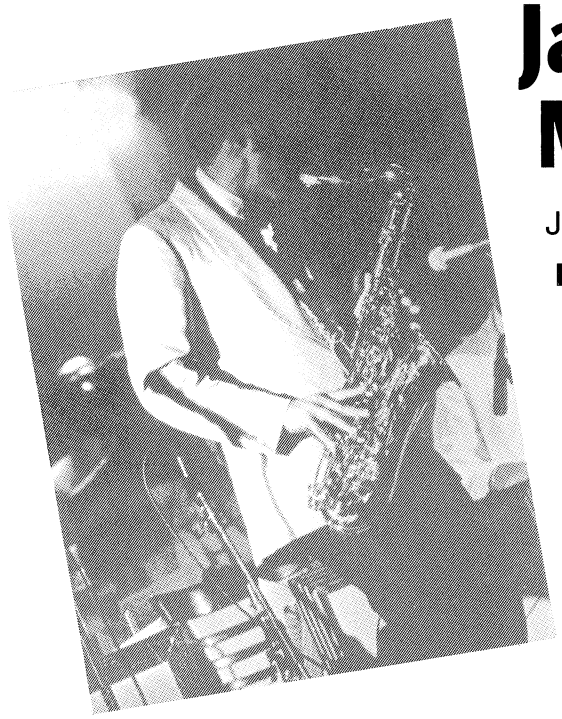

Jammin' at the Margins

Jazz and the American Cinema

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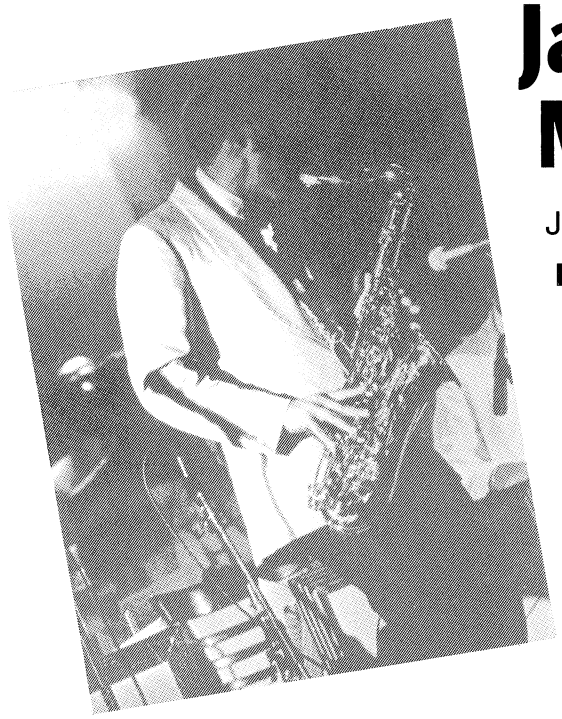

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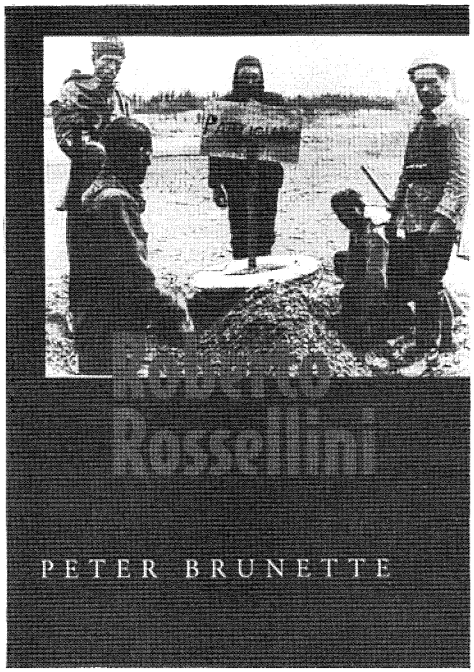

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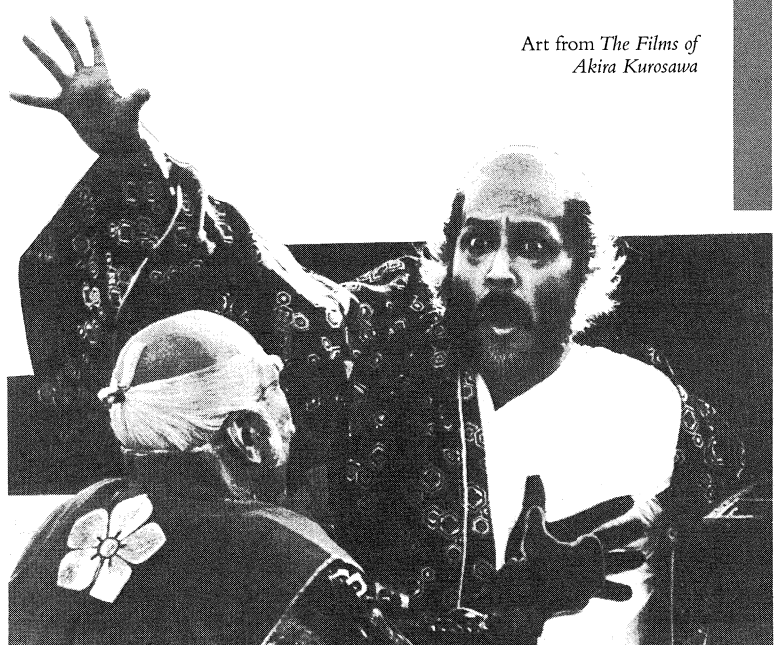

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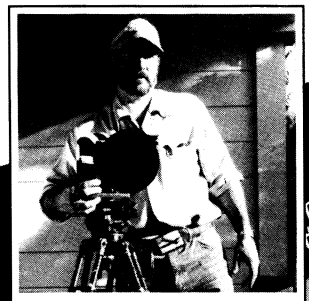

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